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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 18 December 2006

Lundi 18 décembre 2006



Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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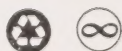
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY — OF ONTARIO

Monday 18 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 18 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HIGHWAY 6

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): In my very first member's statement in this House, in November 1990, I called upon the government of the day to move forward with improvements to Highway 6 through the county of Wellington, including the construction of passing lanes. The need for repairs to Highway 6 was identified by my predecessor as the MPP for Wellington, Jack Johnson, in the late 1980s.

Highway 6 is the most important north-south corridor in the county of Wellington, from Wellington North to the Puslinch township. It is our main route to the city of Guelph, our pathway to the 401 and our gateway to the markets of the world. Highway 6 is critical to the continued economic success of our county.

In 2003, it appeared to me that we needed to redouble our efforts to improve our transportation infrastructure. Working with our municipal councils, we developed the Waterloo–Wellington Transportation Action Plan. Improvements to Highway 6 were a key component of our plan, and I'm pleased to inform the House that the Ministry of Transportation has recently called for tenders to rebuild Highway 6 from Fergus north to Arthur. The work will include repairs, bridge repair and new passing lanes and is estimated to be a \$20-million job.

We should express our appreciation to the Honourable Donna Cansfield, Minister of Transportation, staff at MTO's southwest regional office in London, and Wellington county council and staff, especially Councillor Lynda White.

I continue to advocate for all the projects in the Waterloo–Wellington Transportation Action Plan that are outstanding to make our roads safer, support local economic development and improve our transit for the 21st century.

DARREN COOGAN

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I'm pleased to rise today to inform the House of a ceremony held recently at the Sikh Spiritual Centre in Rexdale to honour Darren Coogan and Satwinder Bajwa,

which I had the pleasure to attend with several of my constituents. The event garnered a full-page picture and an article in the GTA section of the *Toronto Star*. A picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes.

On November 11, Mr. Bajwa was involved in a serious collision in which the utility van he drove for work crashed and erupted into flames after hitting a deer. Mr. Bajwa was trapped inside with a broken hip as the chemicals he uses for his employment as a bus mechanic quickly caught on fire, turning the van into a deadly inferno. In a totally selfless act, Mr. Coogan broke the window with only his elbow, pulling Mr. Bajwa out and undoubtedly saving his life.

Please join me, along with my constituents of Brampton West–Mississauga, in commending Mr. Coogan for his heroic act and to wish Mr. Bajwa a full and speedy recovery. Thank you, Darren, for your selfless act, and thank you, Mr. Bajwa, for recognizing him in one of the most beautiful ways possible.

CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It was quite an evening on Saturday, December 9 at Logos Land, just outside of Cobden, in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, when Canada's tallest Christmas tree was switched on. The tree is a whopping 80 feet tall and is illuminated by 13,000 LED bulbs. This year's celebration was attended by nearly 5,000 people, who came to dedicate the lighting to the brave men and women of our armed forces serving in Afghanistan and their families.

Special guests at the ceremony were none other than our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, and his daughter, Rachel. Joining the Prime Minister and Rachel on the stage were Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke MP Cheryl Gallant; Colonel Denis Thompson, commander of 2 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group; and two elementary school students, Megan Gruhl and Nathan Layman, who, along with Colonel Thompson, tripped the switch to light the tree. I was honoured to be asked by event co-ordinator Bruce McIntyre to sing our national anthem for this very special occasion.

It is never an easy time to be serving in our armed forces as they work to bring peace, order, democracy and freedom to the people of Afghanistan. To be separated from their families at this special time of year makes it even harder. The people of Renfrew–Nipissing–

Pembroke wanted to let them know how much we appreciate the noble work they do and how much we support them in their mission. To have the Prime Minister there to help deliver that message, broadcast live to the troops, was just fantastic. To the organizers of the event, a big thank you. To our troops, Merry Christmas, God bless you, and we pray for a successful mission and a safe return to your families.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce Jim MacDonald. Jim MacDonald lives on Manitoulin Island, in your very own riding of Algoma–Manitoulin. I have spoken about Mr. MacDonald in this House before, and he honours us all with his presence here today.

Jim lives with cancer and is a recipient of ODSP benefits. He is the father of five children, ages seven to 17. His wife used to work, until she found out that the policies of this government have made it nearly impossible. She realized that ODSP's incentives for employment were costing the family more than she actually earned. Jim is confused as to why you have decided to benefit yourselves and ourselves financially during this season of goodwill instead of honouring your commitment to end the clawback and give social service recipients a decent increase. Jim's children lose about \$350 each and every month that you continue to claw back the NCBS that the federal government provides. During this holiday season, Jim is hoping for word that, along with yourselves, you will start caring for our lowest-income kids by honouring your promise to them to end the clawback.

He is also hoping against hope that this government will develop policies that reward those like his spouse for trying to provide for their family rather than take every single penny she is able to earn back to yourselves.

ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

PROGRAMME D'APPRENTISSAGE POUR LES JEUNES DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Last week, I had the pleasure of making an announcement on behalf of the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Last Monday, Minister Bentley announced an extra \$8.25-million investment in the Ontario youth apprenticeship program.

Le programme d'apprentissage pour les jeunes de l'Ontario est un programme de transition de l'école au travail offert dans les écoles secondaires de la province. Les élèves à plein temps des 11^e et 12^e années obtiennent des crédits d'éducation coopérative en faisant des stages dans des métiers spécialisés.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board received \$153,000; the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board received \$118,000.

Le gouvernement octroie aussi 97 000 \$ au Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien. Finalement, le Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario a reçu 96 000 \$.

There is a record number of students participating in the OYAP program to date. In Ottawa alone, it is projected that in 2006-07, about 3,125 Ottawa-area students will benefit from this program.

Le nombre grandissant d'élèves qui participent au PAJO rapproche le gouvernement de son objectif de porter à 26 000 le nombre d'inscriptions annuelles à la formation en apprentissage en 2007-2008.

OYAP gives students more options and opportunities so that they are encouraged to stay in school, to learn a new skill and to pursue a field of study that interests them most. Once again I would like to thank the Premier and the minister for this wonderful investment in our youth.

DRESS THE PART

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to rise today in recognition of a great event that I attended last week in Oshawa called Dress the Part, a half-day workshop targeted to low-income women looking to re-enter the workforce. The event, organized by Avocation, a non-profit organization that helps Durham residents overcome barriers to employment, provided a forum to connect job-seeking women with image professionals, makeup artists and free, gently used business clothing donated by local businesses and residents of our community.

1340

Women attending Dress the Part had the opportunity to listen to many different information sessions throughout the morning, such as the Power of Women and Dress Right 4 Your Body Type, each dealing with the aspects of readying themselves for the task of searching for a job. After the various presentations, women then received one-on-one consultation sessions with image professionals.

Equipping women with the tools they need to create the image they want is vital to bolstering the most important quality of all when seeking employment, which is, of course, a healthy level of self-confidence. As the founder and executive director of Avocation, Faelyne Templer, stated at the event, "We all know that when we look good, we feel good, and are therefore more confident to achieve the goals we want." She also noted how difficult it can be to put together a wardrobe on a budget.

Re-entering the workforce takes courage and persistence, and I would like to take this opportunity to applaud all the women in Durham region and across this province who are currently undertaking this task. I would also like to thank Ms. Templer and all those involved with Avocation for organizing such an important event.

HIV/AIDS IN AFRICA

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I rise in the House today to bring your attention to a project that is being undertaken by students from an interdisciplinary class at M.M. Robinson High School in Burlington. Why Burlington? These fine young people are working exceptionally hard to raise awareness of the crisis created by HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Recently, we celebrated World AIDS Day, and this past summer the 16th International AIDS Conference took place right here in Toronto. While watching some of the conference on TV, let me tell you what I remember most about this conference that was important to me. It wasn't the celebrities and it wasn't even the researchers, although I support both; it was the grandmothers from Africa and their stories that I will always remember and keep close to my heart.

Most of us cannot imagine what it's like to raise your children and helplessly watch them die; to see your grandchildren orphaned because of a disease out of control unnecessarily and to see these children stigmatized because of the disease—in some cases no grandparents are available, so as young as 11-year-olds are raising families the best they can; to know that the spread of AIDS/HIV in Africa threatens to wipe out an entire generation of children.

But, Speaker, I don't need to tell you or the members of this House about this epidemic and the devastation that it leaves behind. So with this sad story, let's all hear the story of hope. One of these stories is the class from MMR. They have taken up the cause to raise awareness of the devastation taking place in Africa, many children dying in Africa, those younger than themselves. These students are a reminder and set a wonderful example for all of us. Their actions will make a difference. We thank them.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I rise to speak about an investment that the McGuinty government is making in Ontario. It will be an important boost in the areas of health and health care services for all Ontarians.

Unlike the previous government that forced years of downloading onto the municipalities, the McGuinty government has announced that it is investing \$300 million between 2006 and 2008 in order to move towards a 50-50 sharing cost for land ambulance services.

What does this mean? It means that finally municipalities will have access to the resources and the funding that they need. It means an additional \$50 million in investments in 2006.

The need to safeguard the health of Ontarians is a number one priority for this government. As a result we have made our Ontario municipal partnership fund flexible enough to respond to the needs of local community programs, which are necessary to the overall health of the community. While other parties cut valuable

resources and funding to health care services, this government has been looking for new ways to not only help cash-strapped municipalities but to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the services they require and they deserve.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I'm quite aware that this is the time of year when Santa reviews whether we've been naughty or nice. I know that statement probably sends shivers through my colleagues across the floor, but I also think that at this time of year it's time to quickly review the great things that are happening in rural Ontario because of the McGuinty government.

We all know that the health of our loved ones is perhaps the most important thing in our society. As a result, health investments have been a priority for this government. We are creating 150 new family health teams, with more than half being put in underserved communities that are in need of health care professionals.

We also know the importance of financial security around this time of year. While the previous government slashed \$80 million from the agricultural budget, the McGuinty government has provided \$910 million over the past three years for farm income stabilization and support programs, including \$125 million announced last spring and \$110 million announced at this year's international plowing match.

We also recognize that our rural community deserves valuable economic supports. That is why we've invested \$22.9 million into our rural communities through the rural economic development program.

I am proud of my constituents, and it's important to recognize that these individuals and others like them in the rural sector have provided many of the goods and services that we enjoy in this holiday season. I want to thank them again and remind them that the McGuinty government is on their side.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT
(BY-LAWS RE ABSENTEE
LANDLORDS), 2006LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS (RÈGLEMENTS
MUNICIPAUX
CONCERNANT LES LOCATEURS
ABSENTS)

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 176, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 /
Projet de loi 176, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les
municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): This bill amends the Municipal Act to allow municipalities to put in place bylaws to regulate absentee landlords within their jurisdiction. It gives them the authority to set up a system to track absentee landlords and to require deposits or bonds for property upkeep.

This bill arises out of an ongoing problem in my riding and many downtown ridings with crack houses. This will give cities the authority to deal with them far more vigorously than they have in the past.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(g), notice for ballot items 69 and 70 be waived.

The Speaker: Shall the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, December 18, 2006, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Ms. Wynne has moved government notice of motion number 279. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker: Ms. Wynne has moved government notice of motion number 279. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Barrett, Toby
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bountrogianni, Marie
Brotten, Laurel C.
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce

Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoy, Pat
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy
Martiniuk, Gerry
Mauro, Bill
McNeely, Phil

Parsons, Ernie
Patten, Richard
Peters, Steve
Phillips, Gerry
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sorbara, Gregory S.
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim

Delaney, Bob
Di Cocco, Caroline
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight

Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Munro, Julia

Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Hampton, Howard

Horwath, Andrea
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley

Prue, Michael
Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 55; the nays are 8.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

DEFERRED VOTES

ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE RÉFÉRENDUM RELATIF AU SYSTÈME ÉLECTORAL

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system / Projet de loi 155, Loi prévoyant un référendum sur le système électoral de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1357 to 1402.

The Speaker: All those in favour will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Barrett, Toby
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bountrogianni, Marie
Brotten, Laurel C.
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Di Cocco, Caroline
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoy, Pat
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy
Martiniuk, Gerry
Mauro, Bill
McGuinty, Dalton
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Munro, Julia
Oraziotti, David
Parsons, Ernie

Patten, Richard
Peters, Steve
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Runciman, Robert W.
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sorbara, Gregory S.
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Dunlop, Garfield
Elliott, Christine

Horwath, Andrea
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Prue, Michael

Sterling, Norman W.
Tabuns, Peter
Yakubuski, John

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 58; the nays are 11.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I'd ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: This bill is referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Under standing order 97(d), I'd like to bring to your attention overdue order paper questions 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240 and 241 in the name of the member for Leeds–Grenville and 254, 255, 256, 257 and 258 in the name of the member for Simcoe North. Interim answers were tabled on November 21; they reported they would provide a full answer in the neighbourhood of December 15, 2006, which we think is an avoidance mechanism.

For order paper questions 260 and 261 in the name of the member for Leeds–Grenville, again we had an interim answer indicating that the full answer would be available last week. For question 287 in the name of the member for Oxford and question 309 in the name of the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock—these are all clear violations of the standing order.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Ministers, I want to remind you that you are required, under standing order 38(i), to file a response to a petition within 24 sitting days of its presentation. Your responses are now overdue. I would ask you to give the House some indication as to when the response will take place. Chief government whip?

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): They will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

VISITOR

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay–Atikokan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to welcome to the Legislative Assembly, in the members' east gallery, visiting from Thunder Bay, my son Dustin Mauro.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): To the Premier: As the Premier is aware, on December 5, 2006, the Auditor General stated in his report that the data contained in the McGuinty Liberals' wait time website was—I'm quoting—"misleading" and needed—again quoting—to be "taken with a grain of salt."

At the same time, Advertising Standards Canada found that the recent taxpayer-funded \$2-million ads claiming that people could reduce their wait times by calling a number or visiting a website—ads that were based on data found by the Auditor General to be "misleading"—raised expectations that remained unsatisfied, made inaccurate claims and omitted relevant information, contrary to the code.

Premier, given this set of facts, are you prepared to stand in your place and admit that the ads were wrong and apologize for this misuse of taxpayers' dollars in an obvious bid to buy votes?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): A few facts I think would be helpful in this regard: First of all, the ad that ran on TV was approved by the Auditor General. The member opposite will know that we have now in place a new regime which requires that the taxpayer dollars that are going to be used to advertise government policies—those ads have to first be subjected to the review of the Auditor General. He did, in fact, review that ad and he did, in fact, approve it.

Secondly, it doesn't matter how you slice it or dice it: Wait times in the province of Ontario are coming down. Whether you look at median times, average times or 90th-percentile times, wait times are coming down in the province of Ontario.

We have embarked upon something that is not without some challenges—there's no doubt about that—but we are proud to be pioneers in this regard. We're collecting information that was never collected before. We're making it public for the very first time, and we're pleased and proud to be able to do that to better inform the people of Ontario.

1410

Mr. Runciman: As the Premier well knows, the Auditor General looks at the issue of partisanship. The advertising council exists to ensure truth, honesty, fairness and accuracy in advertising. They found that you violated sections 1(a) and (b) of the Canadian code of advertising standards with your ads on wait times. They deal with accuracy and clarity. Section 1(a) says, "Advertisements must not contain inaccurate or deceptive claims ... either direct or implied." Section 1(b) says, "Advertisements must not omit relevant information in a manner that, in the result, is deceptive." Those are the clauses your ads were found to violate.

Will the Premier admit today that he was wrong to run the ads, will he apologize to the taxpayers, and will he commit to have the Ontario Liberal Party repay the \$2 million spent on these ads to the public treasury? Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It's becoming apparent, as we pioneer in this area and embark on a journey which all other governments were afraid to embark upon, that from time to time you'll run into conflicting opinions from various experts. The Auditor General said that this was a good ad; he gave it the thumbs-up and so we ran with it.

Now we hear from another body that they take issue with that.

We are also relying on the medical experts who put forward information and presented it in a very specific way on our wait times website, which is a very popular website; in fact, we've had more than 2.1 million hits on that website. The Auditor General takes issue with the way in which that information is being presented, even though it was approved by medical experts. So what we've done is asked former Senator Kirby to take a look at it, to give us his best advice as to how we reconcile the conflicting opinions we're getting from the Auditor General and our medical experts. But our intention remains the same: to collect this information and to present it in the very best way possible to Ontarians.

Mr. Runciman: This is an old shell game the Premier likes to play: He's comparing apples and oranges. The Auditor General looks at a different set of standards. We've pointed that out, and the Premier is refusing to take this seriously.

Premier, may I remind you that the advertising council includes approximately 170 leading advertisers, advertising agencies, media organizations and suppliers to the advertising sector? Through their membership, they communicate their commitment to responsible advertising. You should take their finding seriously, not only because they are serious but because I have here a list of the members of the council and one of those members is the government of Ontario.

The ads were found to be in violation of the Canadian code of advertising standards. They made inaccurate claims. They omitted relevant information.

You should apologize. The Ontario Liberal Party should repay \$2 million to the taxpayers and pay for public retractions of the ads. Will you commit to those three things today?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: No, I won't. The ad was approved by the Auditor General. The ad said that there are more nurses; in fact, we're now funding 4,300 more full-time positions. The ad said that there were more doctors, and there are, because we've increased medical school spaces by 23%; there are 104 new spaces. There are 750 new international graduates working in Ontario and 470 more in assessment. There are more MRI technologists. Angiography waits are down by 39%. Angioplasty waits are down by 18%. Cataract surgeries are down by 27.7% in terms of wait times. Hip replacement wait times are down 20%; knee replacements, 20%; MRIs, 13%; and CT scans, 2.5%.

Again, we are doing something that's never been done before. It's not easy, and we will work our way through it. We're collecting information. We're making it available to the public. We'll work with all the experts involved to make sure we do it in the best way possible.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier. The occupation of the Douglas

Creek Estates in Caledonia is now in its 294th day. Tensions and frustrations on both sides of this dispute remain high. There was an ill-advised protest this past weekend that those of us on both sides of this House tried to discourage. And then came reports that someone broke into and vandalized the home of a family whose house backs onto the disputed land. Residents are worried that these tensions will go on indefinitely. Last week, a protest spokesperson noted, "We are here indefinitely. We are here to stay."

The province has given the occupiers the green light to remain throughout the winter, a situation that is causing obvious tensions that put the aboriginal protesters and nearby residents at ongoing risk of inflammatory incidents. Premier, has the government at least asked the native protesters if they would, as a goodwill gesture, leave the occupied site while negotiations continue, or will you completely abandon your principle that the protest should not continue throughout the winter?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Around the main table of negotiations that the province set up, at which the federal government now has the lead role, from the very beginning it was made clear by the government of Ontario and the federal government that the object of the negotiations was not only to settle the outstanding disputes in the area but also to find an end to the occupation. That is one of the main goals of the main table. There is a side table, a technical table, that works on issues directly related to the Douglas Creek Estates property, and that is one of the main goals of this government: to end that occupation.

Mr. Miller: On June 16, 2006, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing promised compensation for homeowners. These are people caught in the middle of the dispute who are having to pay a huge price for the failure of the government to keep its word. The press release, which I have here, says, "The McGuinty government is providing emergency financial assistance to residents in Caledonia directly affected by the continuing blockade." Six months and two days later, the homeowners have seen no compensation. Why is the Premier breaking this important promise to the people of Caledonia?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I would say to the member that we are continuing to work, and in fact Mr. Gerretsen's staff is working with residents in Caledonia and other representative groups in Caledonia to make sure that the package we have promised, when delivered, is exactly the right package for the people in need. We continue to work with those people to discuss what their concerns are and what expenses they have incurred, to make sure we get the compensation package exactly right so that it fits the need of the people there.

Mr. Miller: That the Premier refuses to answer this simple and direct question is very telling. We have a

situation in Caledonia that has seen innocent people caught in the middle, innocent people who are frightened for their safety and who have seen their property values dropping. We have a situation where the government of Ontario hastily moved to buy the disputed land, compensated businesses and promised to compensate homeowners. We have a situation where the McGuinty Liberals claim that all is well in Caledonia, but that characterization doesn't match up with the reality experienced by residents on a daily basis.

Six months ago, Dalton McGuinty promised to compensate homeowners. Six months have passed and nothing has happened. We are a week away from Christmas. Will the Premier keep his promise before Christmas?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The government is going to keep its promise. As I have said, officials from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs have been working with the homeowners and others in the community to make sure that we do get it right. We want to make sure that, when announced, the package is well accepted by the people who have that need.

I would say to the member that nobody has ever said everything is just well in Caledonia. What we have said is that, as we have been able to lower the temperature since the beginning of that occupation, we are now focused at the negotiating table and not on the occupation. But what happens from time to time is that, when we get these outside influences, incidents arise again. But what we've done all along is to focus on negotiation. Of course, when other things happen, the police are doing their proper job.

HYDRO OPERATIONS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: last week, I listened intently when you said that you were going to do something to ensure that Hydro consumers were respected. That was last week. This week, we find out from the *Globe and Mail* that under the McGuinty government, the costs associated with the operation of Ontario's hydroelectricity agencies have soared. Operation, maintenance and administration costs under the McGuinty government have increased by \$1.2 billion, and of course Hydro executive pay has skyrocketed.

My question is this: Premier, how does the McGuinty government justify this \$1.2-billion increase in operating costs and the skyrocketing salaries of Hydro executives?
1420

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): There is no question that the undertakings in 1998 around the breakup of the old Ontario Hydro have not come to pass. We have been delighted to apply the auditor to Hydro One and OPG as well as other agencies of the government. The kinds of findings that have come about as a result of the auditor's most recent report have led to, I think, a rather quick response.

It is always in the interests of ratepayers to look at costs. To that end, we will continue to work with the boards of all the affected agencies to ensure that costs are managed in as effective a manner as is possible.

Mr. Hampton: It didn't surprise me that the Premier doesn't want to answer this question, because this leads back to him. The fact is, when most ordinary Ontarians look at their hydro bill, it has now doubled, and there are literally tens of thousands of workers in the province who know that their job has been destroyed as a result of skyrocketing electricity rates. Meanwhile, the Premier has created yet another hydroelectricity agency, the Ontario Power Authority, and he has put his former Bay Street bag man, Mr. Jan Carr, in charge, giving him a \$600,000-plus salary. But it's even worse than that, because at the Ontario Power Authority the operating costs under the McGuinty government have quadrupled, exceeding all forecasts.

My question to the Premier: Since he wanted to speak about this last week, can he tell hard-pressed hydro consumers across the province: What exactly is the McGuinty government's plan to ensure that hydro consumers are respected?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: First of all, the first step to respect is to point out that the price of electricity is lower today than it was when we took office, so let's not forget that.

The second thing to point out is that, prior to the creation of the power authority, there was nobody in Ontario doing power planning. I read the comments of the old Hydro executive in the *Globe and Mail* about how few people they did it with. Remember Darlington?

Planning is an important function of the power authority. Its budget has been appropriately used this year. The work it has undertaken is important to the future of our electricity system and important to the people of Ontario. Their work will continue, their costs will be managed appropriately, but the work must go on, the planning must begin. We need a cleaner, greener, more reliable supply of electricity. This government is committed to that.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government says that hydro rates are coming down. I invite any member of the McGuinty government to go to the Abitibi Mission mill in Thunder Bay, where they were just told that workers there have three weeks of downtime. Why? Because the costs of producing in Ontario are too high. And the principal cost? Hydro rates.

Here is the real issue, though. The Premier likes to give speeches about respecting hydro consumers, but the McGuinty government, it is clear, doesn't have a plan to respect hydro consumers. The McGuinty government has presided over the explosion in salaries and the explosion in operating costs.

I say to the Premier, if you really want to respect hydro consumers, if you really want to get to the bottom of what is going on, what I suggest we need is a public inquiry to look at the explosion in Hydro executive salaries and to look at where the increase of \$1.2 billion in operating costs went. Premier, will the McGuinty gov-

ernment take the issue of hydro costs seriously and call a public inquiry so we can get to the bottom of the problem instead of hearing more speeches from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government takes hydro costs very seriously. That's why the steps we've taken have been undertaken.

The member referred to the power authority's increase in budget. I do think the public needs to know that 73% of that new funding was allocated to conservation, something that that member wouldn't have a lot of understanding or sympathy for, because they cancelled all conservation programs when they were the government.

The reason the McGuinty government asked the Provincial Auditor to look at these organizations is to shine a light on how they are managed. That's why we applied freedom of information; that's why we applied salary disclosure. The steps this government has taken are the appropriate steps. Over time, they will lead to greater confidence in the sector and in members of that sector.

We remain committed to and are delivering more affordable, greener, and more reliable electricity to the people of Ontario today and well into the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier: Premier, if you attacked Hydro fat cats and executive pay salaries over there with the same tenacity with which you attack a 31% pay increase for yourself, greed at Hydro One, OPG and OPA would be ancient history. That's what people across Ontario can't understand. They see Hydro executive salaries skyrocketing, they hear the Premier give speeches, but nothing gets done.

My question is this: Why does the McGuinty government have the time and energy to spend literally a week and a half here forcing through a 31% pay increase for itself when you don't seem to have any time or energy to address the skyrocketing costs and the skyrocketing salaries in the hydro system under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I think the leader of the NDP knows where I stand on this issue. He knows that I'll be voting in favour of this bill and that I will be accepting the increase that comes with it.

I want to draw his attention to Bill 173. If you take a look at the explanatory notes, it specifically says, I say to my friend opposite, that this bill "enables a current member to choose to be bound by the current provisions that govern his or her annual salary." It says, "Notice of the member's choice must be given to the Speaker within 60 days after the bill receives royal assent, and the notice is permanent and irrevocable."

That provision is in there to allow for members who choose to object on principle to avail themselves of that specific election. There's only one way for anybody to oppose this bill on principle—it's irrevocable, it is un-

equivocal—and to make it permanent, and that is to opt out. I say to Mr. Hampton, will you opt out of this bill?

Mr. Hampton: I say to the Premier, if you showed half the energy—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade will come to order. I won't warn her again.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: I say to the Premier, if you showed half the energy in addressing the skyrocketing salaries that have happened in the hydroelectricity system under the McGuinty government, if you showed half the energy and the tenacity in dealing with the \$1.2-billion increase in hydro operating costs, maybe all those ordinary people out there who are having trouble paying the hydro bill would understand why you want to increase MPP salaries. But when they can't pay the hydro bill and when many of them live on salaries of less than \$31,000 a year, they take exception to your desire to increase the salary by—

The Speaker: The question's been asked. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP gives every impression that he remains adamantly opposed to the consequences of this bill. I assume he's going to vote against it, but I have every reason to believe that he will not avail himself of the option here. There's only one way to unequivocally, irrevocably, permanently and verifiably not take the pay hike and that is to say that he's going to sign on to that option. I think what the people of Ontario want to know is, now that we're all being clear and straightforward—I'm going to take the raise and I'm going to vote for it. Mr. Hampton, I believe, is going to vote against the bill and take it anyway, unless he assures this House now that he will in fact opt out.

1430

Mr. Hampton: Premier McGuinty is wrong again. Premier, I'm going to give any increase that might come to me to charities. What are you going to do with yours, Premier—put it in your pocket?

I want to ask about Kelvin Shmeichel, who runs—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Order. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs will come to order. I will not warn her again. The Minister of Natural Resources. I won't warn him again.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, my question is about Kelvin Shmeichel. He runs one of the two community stores in the community of Pickle Lake. The transmission system which delivers electricity to his community is so unreliable that he's lost \$100,000 from his business, and he's afraid even to make any insurance claims. He sees the skyrocketing salaries at Hydro One. He sees the skyrocketing operating costs; he pays for them every month on his hydro bill. What he wants to know from you is, with the skyrocketing hydro bill, the skyrocketing

salaries at Hydro One and OPG, why isn't the delivery of electricity to his store any better under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, the leader of the NDP gives the impression that he remains adamantly opposed. He tells us that he might do something vis-à-vis charities; of what duration, we have no understanding whatsoever. There's only one clear way to oppose this bill. There's only one way to do it that is verifiable, that is permanent, that is irrevocable and that is verifiable, and that's to avail yourself of the option. So I'd ask Mr. Hampton on behalf of the people of Ontario, since he's so adamantly opposed to this pay increase: Will he in fact reject it now and forever?

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I guess we're going to get an annual filing from the leader of the NDP.

To the Premier: Premier, I want to call your attention to the issue of employers becoming liable to pay for the so-called health tax. The December 16 Toronto Sun reported the Toronto Transit Commission will have to retroactively pay \$12 million for its employees' health tax for the past two years. The TTC chair estimates that taxpayers will have to shell out between \$5 million and \$6 million annually going forward just for this specific situation.

Premier, do you have any idea how many more cases like the TTC's there are in Ontario and what the total cost to taxpayers could be?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I guess the first thing to say to my friend is that there are some 60 cases that were before arbitrators, and in 51 of those cases, the ruling of the arbitrator was of the same view as we were when we introduced the Ontario health premium, and that is that the responsibility to pay the premium lies with individual taxpayers.

At the same time, I want to say to you that we understand that it is the responsibility of arbitrators to interpret collective agreements, and obviously we would not interfere with those interpretations. The final thing is to say that we are aware of the judgment of the Ontario Court of Appeal and we are going to be reviewing that judgment very carefully.

Mr. Runciman: Once the precedent is set, I think you should be reviewing it very closely. As we told you back in 2004, the total cost could be in the neighbourhood of \$500 million. That's \$500 million that won't be available for hospitals, long-term-care facilities or classrooms.

On October 27, 2004, the Premier told the assembly that it has always been your government's intention that taxpayers would pay this and not employers, and that remains your intention; you've just reiterated that. But the TTC case shows you've been caught red-handed,

some might say, after saying, "Nobody will have to pay the health tax twice." Taxpayers will now foot the bill again, likely through a TTC fare hike, a property tax increase or perhaps both.

Minister of Finance, you've had two years to correct this. You chose to do nothing. You could have avoided this if you'd kept your promise not to raise taxes. Can you give us some indication today: When will you keep your promise and not force employers to pay this illegal health tax?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The member himself puts on the floor the information that makes his case so weak. He said a couple of years ago that this could cost the taxpayers some \$500 million. The fact is, as a result of matters being brought under collective agreements before arbitrators, of the 60 cases before arbitrators, 51 of those cases have confirmed the view of the government. We were waiting, as I said in this House several months ago, for the deliberation of the Court of Appeal on this matter. That decision has now been rendered and we are studying that decision very carefully.

I reiterate: When we introduced the bill, after we introduced the bill and today, the liability for the Ontario health premium is an individual liability, not an employer liability.

SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The question is to the Minister of Education. Last week, the trustees of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board ended the charade surrounding your power grab at their school board. The local trustees voted unanimously not to participate in your provincially appointed management team and called on you to change the title of your agent from "chair of the co-management team" to "supervisor." Will you admit that your so-called co-management chair is really the supervisor of a takeover team, one in a long line of takeover teams dating back to the Harris-Eves regime?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): First of all, I'd like to say that 71 of the 72 boards in Ontario have balanced their budget. It's a terrific record. I'm in a very good dialogue with the boards moving into next year.

My answer to the member opposite is no; I will not admit that there has been any failure in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board. What we're doing is we've got a gentleman, Norbert Hartmann, in place who is working with the trustees, willing to listen to the trustees and has been meeting with the trustees. He has been meeting with them and talking with them. The fact that the trustees at this point are not taking the offer of being part of the co-management team does not change the fact that we are open to conversation with them, we are collaborating with them, and that is why Norbert Hartmann is there doing the work in the way he is.

Mr. Marchese: If the minister was really interested in a co-management team, why did your appointee, Mr.

Hartmann, unilaterally impose a 10% reduction in spending with no consultation from the other members of the so-called co-management team? If the minister was really worried about prudent spending, she would stop wasting the \$1,500 a day that she's paying Mr. Hartmann and the almost \$140,000 that has been blown on advisers.

When will the minister return control of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board to the duly elected trustees, provide the funding that is being denied and allow the local trustees to do the job they were elected to do?

1440

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I know that the member opposite was a school trustee at one point, but he has no idea of what it's like to be under supervision. When I was a school trustee with the Toronto board, I was under supervision under the previous government. There was no communication with us as trustees. There was no interest in hearing what we had to say. In fact, the trustee supervisor came in and locked doors between the staff and our offices. It was a shameless, shameless display of arrogance.

What we're doing in Dufferin-Peel Catholic is, we've put a person in place who is willing to talk and has been talking to school trustees and who is interested in what's going on in the community and what the issues are and are not. I am absolutely confident that Mr. Hartmann is going to be able to work with the trustees. I'm also confident that the new trustees who have been elected are going to be interested in working with him.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): My question is for the Minister of Finance. As we near the end of this year, I know that Hamilton and municipalities across the province are beginning to plan their budgets for the year 2007. I think it's fair to say that with growing populations and many of the pressures they face, municipalities will be counting on the stable funding the province has provided in past years. I know that for many of them, including Hamilton, finding out how much funding will be received through the Ontario-municipal partnership fund is critical to their planning. Can you tell us when municipalities can expect to hear from you on 2007 OMPF funding allotments and if there will be anything different in this year's funding?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): As it turns out, it's a timely question because the letters are going out, as we speak, to municipalities concerning the Ontario-municipal partnership fund. More important than that, and even better news, is that we're providing this year some \$824 million to the partnership fund. That represents an 8% increase over last year and a 33% increase over what was being provided by the previous administration under a system that was chaotic, unfair and inequitable.

The very good news, because all politics is local, is that the city of Hamilton will be receiving an increase of some \$3 million for funding of almost \$36 million under the fund. Hamilton deserves it and we're proud to provide it.

Ms. Marsales: Thank you, Minister. We are very happy to hear that good news, and thank you for the update.

I know that Hamilton will be glad to know that the McGuinty government has listened to their concerns, particularly with respect to the burden of social program costs on the property tax base. Despite our own fiscal challenges, we have responded to the best of our ability to support our municipal partners. It's great news for Hamilton to see such an increase, but will this be true for all other municipalities in the province? Can you explain to us why some municipalities will be seeing more funding than others, and if any municipality will be seeing a decrease in the funding this year?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: The first thing to point out is that no municipality will see a decrease in 2007. The reason some municipalities get more and some get less is that the new formula is designed to provide equitable funding, taking into consideration a wide variety of factors.

I would simply add that I am very proud of the work we have done with municipalities, particularly under the leadership of my colleague Mr. Gerretsen as Minister of Municipal Affairs. We are in the midst of a consultation process looking at a wide variety of financial issues between municipalities and the provincial government. But this program, the Ontario-municipal partnership fund, has been a really important new foundation between the provincial government and hundreds of municipalities around the province.

LANDFILL

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier. As you know, a little more than a month ago I tabled a resolution on the Green Lane landfill deal, which incidentally is scheduled to close at some time this week. Allow me to refresh your memory about the content of the resolution. It asks the following—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. The Minister of Labour will come to order.

Member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr. Miller: Allow me to refresh your memory about the content of the resolution. It asked for the following: proof that the region surrounding the Green Lane landfill is willing to take Toronto's garbage; a guarantee that the landfill will not operate beyond its current scheduled closing in 2018; and a call to the city of Toronto to take the necessary steps to reduce their waste so the city can stop shipping garbage to the London area by 2012. The resolution passed and received support from all parties.

Premier, could you tell this Legislature and the people of Ontario: In the month that has elapsed, who at the city

of Toronto have you contacted to ensure that the goals of this resolution are being met?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to assure this Legislature that I very much value the input of the Legislature. All sides of the House had an opportunity to debate that resolution during private members' time. Unfortunately, the members opposite seem to want to play politics with a very serious and important issue to the community in London—and Southwold, in fact, where this landfill is located—who are working closely with the community around them and have done so for many, many years.

The role of the province is to undertake an environmental assessment, as we did; impose some very stringent standards and conditions, as we did; monitor the certificate of approval and, again, impose more stringent standards; and provide municipalities right across the province with the tools they need to be able to better manage their waste. Those are the active steps we take every single day at the Ministry of the Environment to ensure that our environment is protected.

Mr. Miller: Premier, one of your major promises to Ontario was that you would respect the role of MPPs and respect democracy. You also said that you would divert 60% of municipal garbage to recycling. One thing has now led to another, and the fact is, you've broken both of those promises. Despite the fact that you insist on continuing to break your promises to hard-working Ontarians, you have an obligation to act on the will of this Legislature.

When you were in opposition, you tabled a very similar resolution. You believed, or said you believed, that communities must be willing hosts to receive waste from other regions. Now, on the eve of the closing of this deal, you are saying to the people of Ontario that you don't believe in the notion of a willing host and that you aren't prepared to at least work with the city of Toronto for the sake of all parties concerned. You have a moral obligation that resolutions passed in this Legislature are acted upon. Will you follow up on the Green Lane resolution passed by the House on November 16?

Hon. Ms. Broten: I guess I find it passing strange that my friend is the one asking this question, because the municipality that he represents is one of the municipalities that currently send their waste to Green Lane.

My friends opposite have a history of failing to respect the role and importance of municipalities and the importance of those political leaders at a municipal level, who are the ones responsible to manage municipal solid waste. I would remind my friend that Mayor Miller has always indicated that he will work closely with the community of Southwold and that the mayor of the township of Southwold, in correspondence dated November 3, 2006, has said that on behalf of his municipality, he welcomes the initiatives and looks forward to initial meetings and discussions with the city of Toronto.

So, municipal leaders right across this province: We respect them. They're working collaboratively together. The community of Southwold and the city of Toronto are currently in discussions and negotiations, and they will undertake that. If they need—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Last week the Health for Life Medical Centre opened in Kingston. It's offering comprehensive health care to people over the age of 50. The first-year membership fee is \$2,500, and it's \$2,000 each year after that. In addition to the non-insured wellness services, the website says, "Any medically necessary medical care, exams, investigations and referrals can be performed at or through the centre as needed, or referred to the appropriate medical specialist. This medically necessary care is taken care of through the Ontario health insurance plan."

Minister, this sounds like "pay your way to the front of the line" health care to me. When are you going to put a stop to it?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To my honourable friend, this is an issue that we take seriously. It would have been great if the NDP had taken it seriously when we had a bill before the House called the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, which actually gave us very strong penalties and sanctions associated with exactly this kind of action.

The ministry is conducting an investigation into the operation of a clinic in Kingston, and we do so on this very, very simple and sound principle: We will not stand by and tolerate a circumstance where an Ontarian is asked or obliged to pay a fee in advance of receiving an OHIP-funded service. The penalties associated with this are strong. They are embedded in the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act. Have no doubt whatsoever that, in a similar way as we applied it to the Copeman model, we will be following this and taking action as is appropriate. And as I said, there's an investigation under way.

1450

Ms. Martel: Bill 8 is working so well that this clinic is up and running. The Cleveland Clinic in Toronto, which also says you can get diagnostic services if you pay a fee, is still in operation and has been all fall. So I say to the minister, if you're going to do something, I'd sure like to know when. For your \$2,500 membership fee, the website also says, "... should you require a family physician, Dr. Kilpatrick can become your family physician. Dr. Kilpatrick is willing to make house calls as necessary." Further, if you want more services from the allied health professionals who work at the centre, nurses included, then the centre "will make arrangements for such services through our staff at the centre and will bill you for the services provided."

Minister, seniors in Kingston want to know that they'll have access to health care in their municipality even if they don't have \$2,500 a year to pay for it. When are you going to stop this "pay your way to the front of the line" operation?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The seniors that the honourable member mentions in Kingston know the honourable member well, because they know that she was more involved than just about anybody else in helping to create the current challenges that they have related to access. But I think our government's commitment to the people of Kingston can be found in the emergence of two very large family health teams, additional funding for the community health centre and, indeed, an additional satellite of a community health centre, all of which are expanding access to universally accessible services in the Kingston community.

As I said on the earlier issue, we will use those powers in the bill that the honourable member voted against in order to be able to bring to heel any organization that we are able to substantiate a claim about that they are acting that way. I remind all members in this House that research for the honourable member passes with a cursory view of a website. Instead, we think it's important to be on-site and to seek to address that. That's why an investigation is under way.

EDUCATION

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is to the Minister of Education. As the minister is well aware, one of the major priorities of our government has been improving the quality of education for our children and students in this province. We're lowering class sizes in the primary grades, we're increasing graduation rates for those in high school, and we're improving student achievement for all students while maintaining peace and stability. We have the support of parents, teachers and our education partners, and even have support on the primary class size initiative from the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Tory, who said in a CP24 interview back in September that he thinks it's "a good initiative."

We can speak of general success in education throughout the province, but the citizens of my constituency want to know how it's impacting our community. Can the minister please inform my constituents how our priorities are making a difference for students in Kitchener Centre?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I thank the member for Kitchener Centre for his advocacy. I want to talk about what's going on in primary class size reduction in the Waterloo region board and the Waterloo Catholic board. When we came to office in 2003, 33% of students in kindergarten to grade 3 were in classes of 20 or fewer. Last year, 50% of those students were sitting in classes of 20 or fewer. In the Waterloo Catholic board, when we came to office, only 27% of kindergarten to grade 3 students were in classes of 20 or fewer. Now, 58% of those students are sitting in

classes—so it's not surprising that the members opposite would agree with this initiative, because we know it is good for students.

In the two boards combined, there are 274 more teachers. Some of those are for primary class size. Some of those are art teachers. Some of those are music teachers. It's been a good year for education in Kitchener.

Mr. Milloy: One of the major accomplishments of the McGuinty government this session is to pass Bill 52, learning to 18, designed to help us meet our priority to help more students graduate. Students will now be required to stay in school until they're the age of 18 or until graduation, and we're also providing students with more choice to help them on their path to success. The bill allows us to expand co-operative programs, develop dual-credit courses, introduce more high-skills majors and engage in a deeper discussion around equivalent learning.

Recently, the minister came to my riding of Kitchener Centre to highlight three student success lighthouse projects at Forest Heights high school aimed to help struggling students to graduate through increased support, extra guidance and unique learning opportunities. I'd like to ask the minister if she can tell this House how programs such as the ones at Forest Heights are helping high school students in Ontario.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: It was really a pleasure to visit with the teachers and the students at Forest Heights Collegiate a couple of weeks ago.

There are three lighthouse projects at Forest Heights Collegiate, and there are 400 students participating in these three programs. There's the reintegrating-engaging-connecting program, which gives students a space where they can get connected back to the school and reclaim some credits. The new horizons immigrant youth program focuses on language and skill development, and the career explorations and integrated services model program gives co-op education students an opportunity to explore other options.

I want to talk about Zeljka Stanivuk. Zeljka is a student in the career explorations and integrated services program, the third one. She nearly dropped out of school. She credits the school's integration worker, Tanya Dale, for helping her to re-engage in learning. She says, "She's the type of person that you simply can't disrespect. Little by little she learned about me. She was the one I could turn to."

HYDRO OPERATIONS

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, you once said that the Ontario Power Authority was going to be a virtual agency with very few employees, maybe 10 to 15. We read on the weekend from Karen Howlett of the Globe and Mail that the budget of this agency has gone from \$14.9 million to \$31 million and next year will go to \$57.4 million. All of this goes directly to the rate base that the people of this province have to pay when

they're paying their hydro bills. This agency is somewhat of an insulative agency to protect you from your flip-flops and your own incompetence when articulating energy policy in the province of Ontario, Minister. I'm asking the minister: How can you justify this kind of increase when the head of this authority is paid \$638,000 and is a personal friend of the Premier? It's only going to get bigger, it looks like. How do you justify this to the people of Ontario? Tell us, please.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): When the previous government broke up the old Ontario Hydro and created five successor organizations, they forgot one thing: forward planning. It's unfortunate that they did, because the electricity supply in Ontario actually decreased under the previous government's administration while demand for electricity went up. It left us in an untenable position, when we came to office, in terms of supplying adequate amounts of electricity.

The OPA was the subject of a long debate in this House. It was established. It has acted on a number of directives, the most important of which so far have been conservation initiatives which account for 73% of this year's budget increase. This planning authority, this planning body, is extremely important to the future of Ontario and to the future of our electricity supply.

Mr. Yakabuski: Minister, yes, this House by your majority did create the Ontario Power Authority. It was your doing, you created it, and you're also the one who had to approve these kinds of unbelievable increases in its budget. That has to go through your office, Minister. In an era when we're seeing the CEO of Hydro One out the door with a \$3-million severance because of questionable behaviour with regard to his spending on his secretary's credit cards, because of the size of that bureaucracy, you want to create another one: \$57.4 million directly to the rate base on your hand, Mr. Minister. You're allowing this kind of spending on something that is basically insulating you to protect you from the real mess that you've created in the Ministry of Energy.

Minister, how can you justify these kinds of increases in an agency that is simply your own creation, your creation to protect you? I believe that \$57.4 million is a bit expensive.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It is essential that we have the ability to plan Ontario's energy future. The member will recall that this year we did the integrated power system plan. Seventy-three per cent of that increase has gone to new conservation initiatives. We started at zero two years ago. There has been an increase in the last two years; there's no question. I expect that increase to moderate now that these things are up and running.

I would remind the member opposite that when his leader was asked what they would do with the power authority—would they get rid of it? What would they get rid of?—he said he didn't know. You need a planning authority in this province, you need to fund it properly, and you need to make sure we have a plan and that we have adequate, reliable and affordable electricity going into the future. That's what Ontarians need, that's what

Ontarians want, and that's what this government is delivering.

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PAPER MILL

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you'll know that last Friday there was a protest in the town of Iroquois Falls in regard to a meeting the town of Iroquois Falls had with the company directors from Abitibi. The people there in the community are worried that once you allow the company to sever off those dams away from the company, the company will therefore be in a better position to make money from selling its hydro through those hydro dams to the grid than from providing cheap power to the paper mill in order to be able to keep that mill running.

The question that the community wants me to ask you is a very simple one: Will you stand today in this House and tell Abitibi that the public hydro dams must provide Iroquois Falls mills with electricity at cost for the duration of those leases?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Mr. Speaker, you know—and he's my friend, the member across the way. We work together on many issues, and he knows that the government of Ontario has neither the power nor the authority to stop such a business transition within a company operating in this country. You're making this an issue as if the government has the ability to step in and have any influence. This company is reorganizing itself. Some people don't like what they're doing, some people support it, but the government has neither the power nor the authority to affect it. There's no permission they need to apply for, so I don't know why you're asking the question.

Mr. Bisson: Minister, I'm asking the question for a simple reason: because there's something called a water-power lease agreement that the province of Ontario has signed with Abitibi, and if you read the lease agreement, it says, "The minister may terminate the lease with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, if he deems the termination to be in the public interest." So you do have the authority under the power lease agreement. Those power dams were built and licensed in order to produce electricity for those mills, not for the purpose of selling electricity to the grid, thus putting those mills out of commission when the electricity prices are going up.

You've seen the story across the north. We have paper mill after paper mill that has been in difficulty. We've had sawmills that have closed down—we've had Smooth Rock Falls go down altogether—and one of the big issues is electricity costs.

The community is asking you, as their local member and as a minister of the crown, to be their champion. Will you do what is right and will you make sure that Abitibi does not use the electricity from those power dams for

anything other than what they were intended for; that is, to deliver electricity to the mills in Iroquois Falls?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: Abitibi wants to make itself more profitable so it can sustain these paper mills and jobs in Ontario. I obviously take a very particular interest in this mill. This mill is in my backyard, and we want to see those jobs staying in Iroquois Falls.

They are a strong company. They are strengthening themselves by doing this. They want to increase their revenues in order to keep sustainable, to sustain those jobs and keep our town sustainable. That's what they are doing, and anything the companies can do to get through this rough period they are having, that many have described as a perfect storm of influences that have really impacted the paper industry, makes the company stronger, makes the jobs sustainable and therefore makes our communities stronger.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, last week we passed the Fair Access to Regulations Professions Act, 2006. It received and passed third reading. As Debbie Douglas from OCASI stated this morning, "It is a decisive step forward in recognizing the skills and expertise of the many internationally trained individuals that come to Ontario."

Minister, I also have a letter here from the Islamic Foundation of Toronto, and it's signed off by Mr. S. Zain Khan, office of the president:

"I'm writing to you not only on behalf of the Muslim community of the GTA but immigrants in general at the passing of Bill 124, a progressive step of mammoth proportions. We salute you and herald the news as a great event in our history as new immigrants."

Minister, now that Bill 124 has been voted on and passed in the Legislature, what does this mean and how will it help us break down the barriers faced by our newcomers?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I want to thank the member from Mississauga East for his question. It's been very inspirational to see the amazing public support for this groundbreaking legislation, the first of its kind in Ontario and Canada, which for the first time has oversight over 34 regulatory bodies—unprecedented.

The positive thing is that now we are moving quickly as a government. This morning we opened up the first-ever access centre for the internationally trained, in partnership with the Minister of Health. It'll be a mentorship centre, an internship centre and a resource centre for the internationally trained to get the help they need to succeed. For too long, too many people have talked about helping newcomers, and they've delayed and navel-gazed. Now we are taking action to help newcomers become a brain gain for this great province and no longer a brain drain.

Mr. Fonseca: Minister, I couldn't be more delighted. I know that many people in my riding of Mississauga East have much hope. You've visited the riding. You've been throughout this province. You've talked to all the many regulated professions and those that are waiting to become part of the regulated professions.

Now that Bill 124 has passed in the Legislature, it is so important to start on the implementation of what is proposed. Internationally trained individuals have been waiting for too long, as you said, Minister. The barriers must be broken down now.

I have a quote here from Madina Wasuge, the executive director of Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion. She says, "This bill represents one of the boldest attempts by a provincial government to address the inequities that confront newcomers."

Minister, I commend you and Minister of Health George Smitherman on the official opening of Global Experience Ontario and HealthForceOntario, a new access and resource centre for internationally trained individuals—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question's been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Colle: These are very, very good days for newcomers to Ontario. We passed the groundbreaking Bill 124, and on Friday announced with Mr. Solberg that the federal money we've been waiting for for years—I know the Premier's very interested in this—the \$300 million over the next two years, is flowing into community groups like SISO in Hamilton. All the groups across Ontario are getting the money they deserve for job placement, for language training, for settlement services. They've never had this money. There's been a freeze for decades—\$300 million over the next two years coming in to help new immigrants.

We opened the access centre up. Bill 124 is coming. Finally, newcomers are getting the respect and investment they've been waiting for. It's about time.

PETITIONS

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly and is present in some form in 25% to 33% of seniors over the age of 75. AMD has two forms: the more common 'dry' type and the 'wet' type. Although the wet type occurs in only 15% of AMD patients, these patients account for 90% of the legal blindness that occurs with AMD. The wet type is further subdivided into classic and occult subtypes, based on the appearance of the AMD on special testing. Photodynamic therapy, a treatment where abnormal blood vessels are closed with a laser-activated

chemical, has been shown to slow the progression of vision loss in both subtypes of wet AMD;

"Whereas OHIP has not extended coverage for photodynamic therapy to the occult subtype of wet AMD, despite there being substantial clinical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of this treatment in patients with either form of wet AMD. Untreated, these patients can expect a progression in their visual loss, with central blindness as the end result;

"Whereas affected patients are in a position where a proven treatment is available to help preserve their vision, but this treatment can only be accessed at their own personal expense. Treatment costs are between \$12,500 and \$18,000 over an 18-month period. Many patients resign themselves to a continued worsening of their vision, as for them the treatment is financially unattainable. The resultant blindness in these patients manifests itself as costs to society in other forms, such as an increased need for home care, missed time from work for family members providing care, and an increased rate of injuries such as hip fractures that can be directly attributable to their poor vision.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fund the treatment of the occult subtype of macular degeneration with photodynamic therapy for all patients awaiting this service."

I am pleased to sign my name to this petition.

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CENTENNIAL OF STANLEY CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas, on January 21st, 1907, the Kenora Thistles beat the Montreal Wanderers 8 to 6 to capture the Stanley Cup; and

"Whereas Kenora is the smallest community to have ever won the Stanley Cup;

"Whereas these Stanley Cup champions—Si Griffis, Eddie Giroux, Art Ross, Roxy Beaudro, Tom Hooper, Tommy Phillips, Billie McGimsie, Joe Hall, Russel Phillips and trainer J.A. Link—are remembered with pride by the people of Kenora; and

"Whereas the city of Kenora will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of this important accomplishment on January 21st with an NHL Oldtimers game; and

"Whereas the city of Kenora will be celebrating the centennial throughout the year;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We invite every member of the Legislature and every Ontarian to make your vacation destination Kenora, on beautiful Lake of the Woods, and witness the breathtaking scenery of northwestern Ontario, witness the hospitality of the people, witness the aboriginal culture and share the pride as Stanley Cup champions."

This has been signed by several residents of north-western Ontario; I affix my signature as well.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that I'm going to read on behalf of my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, to whom I send my greetings. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the people of the province of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and their grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child.

"Subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas we support Bill 8 as introduced by MPP Kim Craitor;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

I have affixed my signature to this petition and I'm going to ask page Or to carry it for me.

LANDFILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): "Whereas there is currently a proposal to more than double the size of the Carp landfill in west Ottawa; and

"Whereas this site has been in operation for some 30 years and had been expected to close in 2010; and

"Whereas the existing site is not in compliance with environmental regulations;

"Whereas the surrounding community has grown rapidly for the past 10 years and is continuing to grow; and

"Whereas this landfill site is at the western gateway to our national capital; and

"Whereas other options to an expanded landfill have yet to be considered; and

"Whereas the municipal councillors representing this area—Eli El-Chantiry and Peggy Feltmate—and the MPP, Norm Sterling, all oppose this expansion;

"We, the undersigned, support our local representatives and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the Minister of the Environment does not approve the expansion of the Carp landfill and instead finds other waste management alternatives."

I've signed it.

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Northwestern Ontario Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder ... Diagnostic Clinic has been operating as a demonstration project since December 2004 with funds received through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;

"Whereas this funding expires July 31, 2006;

"Whereas there is an enormous need in northwestern Ontario for regional access and accurate diagnosis of FASD;

"Whereas, without the northwestern Ontario FASD clinic, services are only accessible through a clinic in Winnipeg, Manitoba, or St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, for which there is a four-year wait;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Be it resolved that the provincial government commit to provide ongoing funding for the maintenance of the regional FASD diagnostic clinic, with two sites in northwestern Ontario."

I agree with the petition. I affix my signature to it and send it to the table by way of page Ian.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas investing in our children's futures through new literacy and numeracy initiatives will allow them to receive the education they deserve; and

"Whereas, through giving school boards access to innovative resources and providing individual attention to students, learning can become more specialized; and

"Whereas the new individual focus programs, such as the turnaround program, have been proven to dramatically see changes in the first phase of trials in 84% of schools that participated; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government has developed a unique, made-in-Ontario strategy that will provide \$25 million to help increase student achievement;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the McGuinty government's efforts in increasing funding for the Ontario-focused intervention partnership in order to aid in the development and enrichment of Ontario's children."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign this petition.

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada's first Nobel Prize recipient; and

"Whereas this great Canadian's original homestead, located in the town of New Tecumseth, is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

"Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe-Grey MPP Jim Wilson's private member's bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come."

Obviously I agree with that petition. I'll sign it and I'm going to give it to page Philip Spencer to bring it to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

"Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

"Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

"Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

"Whereas a coroner's jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day."

I've affixed my signature as well. Thank you kindly, sir.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): I'd like to present the following petition on behalf of my colleague from Niagara Falls, addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I support this petition, I put my signature to it and I send it with page Philip.

1520

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I've received more petitions to do with pedestrian access to the Mary Lake dam, and they read:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway, where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been sent to me by residents of London. It reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government to take action to ensure that residents in Ontario long-term-care homes are treated with dignity and respect. This sector has been underfunded, with increased reliance on for-profit operators while resident health needs grow in complexity and scope. The residents of these homes are the most vulnerable within our communities, and they deserve no less. We call upon the government to immediately enact a minimum staffing standard in Ontario long-term-care homes. Each long-term-care home must be both required by regulation and equitably funded to provide a minimum amount of nursing and personal care for each resident. US studies have shown a staffing level in excess of four hours necessary to ensure optimal care. Studies indicate a direct link between quality care and staffing levels in nursing homes. To ensure optimal care for residents, funding enhancements for nursing and personal care need to be directed to hiring front-line staff and not be used to reduce deficits or hire clerical staff, as has occurred in the past. Health care workers are providing care to as many as twice the number of residents common only a decade ago."

I agree with the petitioners and I affix my signature to this.

FAIR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I'm delighted to tell you that this petition is also in support of the MPP for Mississauga West, Mr. Delaney, and it has to do with access to trades and professions in Ontario. It's addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

"Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent, arbitrary and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

"Whereas action by Ontario's trades and professions could remove many such barriers, but Ontario's trades and professions have failed to recognize that such structural barriers exist, much less to take action to remove them, and to provide fair, timely, transparent and cost-effective access to trades and professions for new Canadians trained outside Canada;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Legislative Assembly urge the members of all parties to swiftly pass Bill 124, the Fair

Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, and to require Ontario's regulated professions and trades to review and modify their procedures and qualification requirements to swiftly meet the needs of Ontario's employers, Ontario's newcomers and their own membership, all of whom desperately need the very skills new Canadians bring working for their organizations, for their trades and professions, and for their families."

Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to sign this petition, and I'll pass it on to page Arianne to send it to you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Mrs. Bountrogianni moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act / *Projet de loi 173, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés et la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Bountrogianni, you have the floor.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Bountrogianni. Once you get it, you don't forget it.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today to begin second reading debate on Bill 173, the Legislative Assembly Statute Law Amendment Act.

There is currently a 40% gap between what MPPs earn at Queen's Park and what MPs are making on Parliament Hill. This legislation proposes steps to close this gap. The province's Integrity Commissioner, the Honourable Coulter Osborne, recognized the need for reform in his recent report on provincial members' compensation. He also concluded that it is in the public interest to ensure that such compensation be fair, that it reflect the important responsibilities of MPPs and that it not fall so far behind the compensation paid our federal counterparts as to risk having the provincial Legislature seen as a farm team for the House of Commons. The changes we are proposing are in keeping with his recommendations.

The Integrity Commissioner observed that a provincial member's salary is \$88,771, while a federal member is paid \$147,700—a 40% gap. He called for provincial members' compensation levels to be linked to federal members' salaries. We represent the same ridings and the same number of constituents as federal MPs, and, in his view, MPPs should not earn 60% of what their MPs earn.

Our government agrees. So does Marilyn Churley, who used to sit with the third party. She said on December 13:

"I think there are reasonable grounds, and have been for some time, for a salary increase, I really do, when you compare it to other jurisdictions, federally in particular, and in this case it was the Integrity Commissioner who did a study. But I do agree ... that there should be a salary increase.... It has been going on for years and years and years where there has been no increase whatsoever, and I do know that MPPs do work very hard."

Just this morning another former MPP from the NDP caucus, David Christopherson, a good friend of mine, also was cited as saying:

"The constituency responsibility of provincial members is as great, if not greater, in terms of just the raw number of casework that comes in. Quite frankly, it's just upside down when you've got quality councillors, say, in the city of Toronto who will not even think about running for the Ontario Legislature because they would have to take a pay cut."

Under this new compensation plan, an MPP would earn roughly \$110,000—75% of what federal members receive. This is only 14% more than city councillors in Toronto and Ottawa, who now earn \$95,000 a year.

While the federal government contributes to the funding of health care, we deliver it. While they contribute to the funding of post-secondary education, we on the ground deliver education, from junior kindergarten all the way through post-doctoral programs. We have the principal responsibility for care and management of our natural environment and for strengthening our economy.

What we are proposing is to move forward to reduce this gap from 40% to 25%. It is a measured and reasonable step, especially when considering, as the Integrity Commissioner did, that MPPs' salaries have not kept up with inflation since 1996.

Cette question suscitera toujours un débat animé aussi bien de la part de ceux qui estiment que les politiciens ne devraient pas être rémunérés du tout que de tous ceux qui aimeraient que les salaires des politiciens soient mis au diapason de ceux du secteur privé.

Cette proposition démontre notre leadership. Elle cherche concrètement à combler l'écart de rémunération par des mesures responsables et réfléchies.

We believe that the Integrity Commissioner's recommendations strike a balance between these extremes, and so we are following his recommendations. The Integrity Commissioner recommended in his December 7, 2006, report that MPPs' pension arrangements be reviewed.

If passed, the legislation would increase the contribution the province makes to a provincial member's registered pension plan from 5% to 10% of salary. This falls short of the Integrity Commissioner's recommendation that MPPs' pension rights be, at minimum, equal to the pension rights of members of the Ontario public service. Even with these modest changes, this is still only about one quarter to one third of what federal members receive. As with the proposed salary changes, we are

doing this to bring MPPs' pension contribution levels more in line with other pension plans.

1530

We're not going back to a gold-plated pension plan like the one that the federal MPs enjoy and one which was once in place in Ontario, prior to 1995. We are not proposing to rewrite the pension framework for MPPs. We're simply increasing the province's contribution to the existing plan in order to narrow the gap between compensation of federal and provincial representatives.

The legislation, if passed, would also change the severance allowance for MPPs. The current severance allowance is one month's salary for each year of service, with a minimum payment of six months and a maximum payment of 12 months. We are proposing that this be changed to create three levels of severance: MPPs with up to four years of service would be allowed six months' salary as severance; those with up to eight years of service would be allowed 12 months' severance; and those with more than eight years of service would be allowed 18 months' severance. Again, this addresses the compensation gap in a reasonable way, respecting the contribution of long-serving MPPs.

We believe that as long as we continue to work hard and serve the best interests of the people of Ontario and the constituents we represent, every one of us deserves to be compensated at least 75% of what our federal counterparts earn. But this legislation also shows our respect for the views of those in this House who do not agree. Upon passage, sitting MPPs within 60 days have the choice to permanently opt out of the new pay and benefits package and continue to be compensated as they are now. Any new MPP—not re-elected MPPs—would be automatically covered by the new framework.

I know that members on all sides of this House did not run for office because of the compensation they would receive, but because of the contributions they could make. In fact, it is a tremendous privilege to serve Ontarians. But at the same time, compensation should not be a deterrent to anyone considering making a contribution to the province as an elected representative. The Integrity Commissioner said that there's a real risk of this happening. He said that if we stay within the current system, we run the risk of making Queen's Park a farm team for Parliament Hill in Ottawa. But Ontarians deserve the brightest and best, and we continue to attract the same calibre of talented individuals who sit here today.

This is not an easy issue because in the end we, as members of the Legislature, must vote on our own compensation. Ontarians can't do that. This is why the Integrity Commissioner recommended that we pass a new law linking our compensation to that paid to Ontario's representatives in the House of Commons. This is what we have done. This legislation is fair, it is in the public interest and I urge all members to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): It's a pleasure to speak, at least for a couple of minutes. I look

forward to my leader's lead and then to speak longer on this bill, but suffice it to say that there is a bill before this House that has passed second reading calling for a minimum wage—I hesitate even to say "increase"; it's catch-up. In 1972, the minimum wage was \$2 a day. Today, using the inflation calculator, that would be just under \$10, and we can't get committee hearings in January and February out of this government to even look at that bill. Here we have a government that very callously goes ahead and votes itself an increase of 31%, when we're asking for 25% for the poorest of our working families. That's number one.

Number two: Of course, today we heard the very cynical response from Dalton McGuinty that the reason that people give to charities is because of the tax benefits. I find that appalling. I'm a United Church clergy by trade. I know clergy, priests and social workers who are working as many hours a day as we are, who work at extremely difficult tasks and who rely on the charitable givings of others. That this government would suggest that charitable givings are motivated by tax benefits is absolutely cynical to the utmost degree, but of course this is a cynical government. This is a government that will not rescind the clawback of the national child supplement. This is a government that will not provide status-of-the-artist legislation and a liveable wage to artists, who are among the poorest in this province. This is a government that will not provide the housing that they promised—20,000 units—and we have 122,000 families in this province waiting for housing. This is a government that will not provide enforcement of the employment standards that we have now, so that one in three employers actually owe their employees money. This is a government that won't see any of that happen, so why should we be surprised?

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): The member from Hamilton Mountain, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and minister responsible for democratic renewal, has encapsulated the view of the Liberal Party, and I want to thank her for doing so. Over the last 16 years, there's been a 5% increase, total, in our pay.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I feel it's unfair to mesh in this particular issue with all of the other ills and problems that we're having in our overall society. This issue is about attracting people to this place who can make intelligent, reasoned decisions about those kinds of issues.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Madame la ministre, j'ai une couple de questions faisant affaire avec le débat. Ne pensez pas pour deux secondes que je dis que le travail que font les députés n'est pas un travail important, et il faut s'assurer, à la fin de la journée, qu'ils soient bien rémunérés.

Le point pour nous autres est très simple. Dans une société où il y a du monde qui regarde le gouvernement provincial pour avoir de l'assistance—dans ma partie de la province, comme dans d'autres parties de la province—il y a des travailleurs qui ont perdu leur emploi à cause de la fermeture de leur usine. Je regarde

par exemple la compagnie Tembec à Timmins, Tembec à Smooth Rock Falls et Tembec encore à Opasatika, et les autres qui ont perdu leur emploi. C'est pas mal difficile pour nous de dire, « Oui, on veut prendre une augmentation, » quand eux autres regardent le gouvernement pour avoir de l'assistance et ils ne voient pas l'assistance qui leur revient. Comme mon amie M^{me} DiNovo a dit, ceux qui sont les plus démunis de notre société, ceux qui travaillent pour un salaire minimum et d'autres qui reçoivent l'assistance sociale, regardent le gouvernement et disent : « Aidez-nous. Nous, les plus démunis de la société, avons chaque jour le problème de garder le pain sur la table et garder les lumières allumées. Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire pour nous assister? »

Vous savez que, dernièrement, le prix de l'électricité a augmenté encore, dans nos comtés, justement. J'imagine que vous avez eu chez vous, comme moi chez nous, des coups de téléphone où ceux qui sont les plus démunis dans notre société disent, « Regardez, depuis les dernières années, le prix de tout garder sur la table a augmenté—l'électricité, le gaz, les taxes foncières municipales—et nos pensions n'ont pas augmenté. » Ce monde-là veulent avoir de l'aide de leur gouvernement provincial.

Le point que je veux faire dans ce débat, c'est que je ne suis pas contre l'idée que nous soyons bien payés, mais je suis contre l'idée qu'on ne fasse rien pour assister ceux dans notre société qui sont les plus démunis et qui font appel au gouvernement provincial pour de l'assistance. Quand le gouvernement dit, « Non, on ne vous donnera pas d'assistance, mais on va se donner une augmentation salariale, » c'est difficile à prendre. Pour cette raison, je vais voter contre, et je me demande pourquoi vous ne cherchez pas à aider les autres.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister Bountrogianni, you have two minutes to reply.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: I thank my colleagues from Parkdale-High Park, Brant, Lanark-Carleton and Timmins-James Bay. I truly do thank the member from Timmins-James Bay for his honesty and transparency on this issue.

It's never a good time to do this. There are people who think all politicians make too much money. There are people who think we make just as much as our federal counterparts. There are people out there who think we have the pensions that our federal counterparts make. In fact, when I was with friends this weekend trying to explain the background of this bill, they too, and they've known me for 20, 30 years, didn't realize that our colleagues here don't have a pension.

This is not an easy issue, and I understand that there's more to be done in the province of Ontario. I agree that there's more to be done, and we will continue to work for the people of Ontario. But this is about the value of the work that we do here. We are no one's farm team here in the Legislature. We have good, intelligent members. And it's not just the members from the Liberal caucus who are being lobbied to go other places like the federal government, or headhunters calling us for better jobs; it's across

the House: Marilyn Churley, Mr. Baird, Mr. Flaherty and others; Mr. Christopherson, of course, who today came out and said that he thinks it's about time that we did this; and Marilyn Churley last week as well.

Interjection: Gerard Kennedy.

1540

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Gerard Kennedy, of course.

There's value. We represent the largest province in the country. We represent one of the largest jurisdictions in the world if you look at our GDP. Ontario matters; Ontario's important. The work we do here matters. This bill begins to address the gap between what we do, very important work, and what our federal counterparts do.

I understand and respect the views of all members of this House. I respect the offers to donate the monies to charity. We can amend the bill very easily by having a trust fund for the increases for those who want to donate it to charities. We can do that very easily and very quickly this week.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Sterling: Having been a member of this Legislative Assembly for almost 30 years now, I have been through this debate before. I've been through this tangle before. I've been through this difficult debate before. While I congratulate the Premier in bringing forward a bill to deal with this issue, I'm sure that it isn't all altruism on his part. It's from a practical need that he faces and a practical need that our leader, John Tory, faces, and that's why he's supporting this bill. In order to attract good, reasoned people, leaders in the community, to come to this place, it's necessary to deal with the compensation issue.

In fact, I might add that the Integrity Commissioner, when he made his report, made it absolutely clear that he did not feel it makes any sense to directly or indirectly link provincial members' compensation to the average wage paid to a worker. He then goes on to point out, however, that many police officers, teachers, tool-and-die makers, judges, bus drivers—and the list goes on—make more than the compensation that MPPs are presently paid.

Now, over this period of time that we've been talking about and as indicated in the Integrity Commissioner's report—the Integrity Commissioner has a table in his report on page 6 which shows the benefits of a member here in 1990. I think one of the things is that unfortunately, when we talk about pay or salaries, we don't talk about the total benefit package that a person receives. For me and for members of this Legislature, it's not the salary that is perhaps the most important; it's the total benefit package that we receive as members here. When I was first elected back in 1977, the attraction of coming to the Legislative Assembly from a very successful law practice had nothing to do with the salary—in fact, the salary I accepted here was about 50% of what I earned in my last year practising law—but it was the defined benefit pension plan where I could protect my family in the future which was the attraction here.

I think what we have to talk about here is, what is the total benefit package that members have been receiving here from 1990 to the present date? In 1990, members received three things from the Legislative Assembly: They received a salary, which was \$44,675; they received a tax-free allowance, which was almost \$15,000; and they had a defined benefit pension plan that was very, very good. In fact, it was worth somewhere between 35% and 40% of their salary, which means it was, in money terms, about \$15,000. This was proven later when all of those schemes were transferred into a salary package in 1995-96. That package in 1990 was worth about \$80,000. Right now, MPPs, before this bill is passed, are receiving a total package of about \$93,000. So the compensation package for MPPs has increased by \$13,000 from 1990 to 2006. That is an increase of probably about 20%. The broader public sector has improved their salary and benefit packages by over 50% over that period of time. What that has led to is this report by the Integrity Commissioner.

I also want to point out that federal MPs, who represent the same number of people in the same boundaries, who have the same constituencies as us, receive a benefit package of over \$200,000 a year. Actually, the benefit package that MPPs are receiving now is about 45% of what federal MPs are receiving in their total benefit package. Their defined benefit plan is worth 35% of their salary base; 35% of \$147,000 is about \$60,000 a year. So they're not only receiving \$147,000 a year; they're receiving in kind, in terms of their benefit package, about \$60,000 a year. Their total package is over \$200,000. So while our Premier is going to be receiving under \$200,000, his brother, David McGuinty, who represents the same constituency as the Premier, still has a better benefit package after Bill 173 is implemented than his brother. David McGuinty has a better package than Dalton McGuinty even though Dalton is Premier and David McGuinty is a backbencher in the opposition.

I bring forward those numbers to show what has happened over the last 15 or 16 years. It's been the fault of our system and the leaders who have been in place during that period of time and their advisers. Premiers, and people who are on the staff of Premiers, are very reticent to come forward to even talk about benefits for MPPs because it evokes such a visceral reaction from the press and from everyone else.

What has happened, of course, is that while we have sat almost in a stagnant position since 1990, other democratic institutions have continued to progress and have given inflationary increases in terms of the benefit package and the salaries to their elected representatives. This is true at the federal level, as I say, where an ordinary MP now has a benefit package of over \$200,000, and we have seen it as well at the municipal level, where they have increased, in their case, their salary and their pension benefits equally as much as inflation has taken hold.

I think the greatest criticism here is that it has been left in neglect for so long that the increase seems excessive in

terms of the percentage that has been going up. So we find ourselves in this particular position that we now are.

I want to quote from my friend Sean Conway, who is now retired, who was asked this weekend—it was quoted in one of the newspapers:

“‘In the last few years, I’ve actually seen something I’ve never seen before,’ said Sean Conway, a Ontario legislator who represented Renfrew for more than 28 years before leaving public office for private opportunities in teaching and in consulting.

“‘People are now leaving Queen’s Park to go back to a municipal government because the pay, the working conditions—including being at home—and what I will call the electoral stability are much more advantageous,’ he said.”

1550

We all know that virtually every incumbent who ran for council in the city of Ottawa—I think there were 17 of 18 incumbents who got re-elected—and virtually every incumbent who ran for council here in the city of Toronto got re-elected as well. The most vulnerable position seems to be the mayor, or the head of council, in terms of longevity in getting re-elected, whereas in this place the average length of service for members here now is eight and a half years. That’s about what it is for all of the 103 members who are sitting here with us today. And, when a member leaves here after eight years of service, he or she may not have the same skills that they had when they entered here to go back into the private workforce.

I know from some of my colleagues from the former Conservative Party who were unfortunate in not being re-elected in 2003 that some of them had a very, very difficult time in obtaining employment when they returned to the private sector after they had been here. Those were people not only with limited education but those who had university training, university degrees, had professional designations and other skills. So the notion that, once one is here for any period of time, you go back into the private sector and use your political experience as a positive is not necessarily true.

I also want to talk about the fact that I really do believe our work here is important. I think that being a member of the Ontario Legislature is one of the best jobs in the world. I certainly didn’t come here because of the monetary rewards for serving here, nor do I believe that other members in this Legislature came here and that that was their primary reason for coming here. We come here because we want to change things for the better for our families, for our communities, and if we’re lucky enough to be put in a position that we can do that, then we have a very satisfying career here in what we do.

But I also believe that we should, as I said before, attract the best that we can in order to do that. Over the period of time that I have been here, the budget of Ontario has gone from—and I’m going to use approximate figures here—about \$18 billion to \$20 billion to about \$85 billion or \$87 billion. That’s a four-fold increase. That doesn’t just mean that we’re spending more money

on things than we did in 1977; we are much more involved in society and the problems have become more complex. So members must be able to understand what the issues are about and must understand where the differences are in order to bring forward resolution to those particular problems and conflicts that we're asked to do.

Jim Coyle of the Toronto Star wrote an article that I would like to quote from as well. He's talking about some of the demands on politicians:

"It's not for nothing the toll on marriages and health is high among politicians, that stress makes rates of alcoholism and ... drug addiction higher, it's been reported, than in the general population.

"It is a bizarre society that complains endlessly about the quality of its politicians and leadership, demands that they master the most complicated of subjects, come up with solutions to our most intractable problems, do so without ever changing their mind, do so under constant glare of media attention and put up cheerfully with whatever character assassination commentators and voters want to hurl their way—and do so for far less money than most could make in the private sector, at pay rates vastly outmatched by those who shoulder a fraction of the responsibility."

As I said, I come to this job voluntarily, and I think it's a great job because it gives me a great opportunity to have an influence on the direction my province is taking and has taken over the last 30 years. However, if we are to ensure that as we go forward we will have people who will come to this place who will be able to make the decisions and understand the complicated process and go back and listen to our people in our constituencies, to bring those here, we must be competitive in what we're going to offer those people.

Members of the Legislature have families too: They have children, they have grandchildren, they have mothers, they have fathers etc. And they have the same kinds of financial and fiscal responsibilities as anybody else does in society. And we have, in addition, the burden of extra costs. We have larger-than-average wardrobes in order to be able to undertake our business; we have—

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Not all of us.

Mr. Sterling: Well, some of us do; some of us don't.

But the cost is not as important as the ability to attract those other people into this place. I have talked with candidates, or people who would like to serve in this place, over the last five to 10 years, and it has become increasingly difficult to convince them that they should come to this place because they just have not been able to see how they would be able to do this in a financial way.

Unfortunately, members of the Legislature—us, ourselves—have been very, very cynical about this whole process. Whenever a member or a person stands up about the needs of members, we attack each other. Those attacks are duly recorded in the media because they raise great attention and great relish. I have great respect for people who give their life to this Legislature and to all democratic institutions, and I believe that we can only

keep the level of MPPs coming to this place up if we are willing to deal in reality with what the competing forces are. Therefore, I strongly support the minister in this bill. I believe that her statements are correct, and I and my party will be supporting this legislation because it's needed for us all to attract people who would seek to be MPPs to come to this place.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Thank you kindly, Speaker. I want to indicate right off the bat that I've got time for the member for Lanark–Carleton. I appreciate his comments on this matter, and the comments are well laid out. But I say this: It's not just the money. It's the fact that, as the Premier has said and others have echoed, "There's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, so let's do it." Because the similar comment is made around, let's say, minimum wage: "It's not a good time to increase minimum wage, so let's not do it." It's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, so let's do it, but it's not a good time to increase the benefits for people on social assistance, so let's not do it. It's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, the Premier says, so let's do it. But it's not the right time to increase the pensions of people with disabilities, so let's not do it. The Premier says it's never a good time to increase MPPs' salaries, so, what the hey; let's do it. But it's not the time to keep our promise to end the clawback of the child benefit to those poorest families in the province, so we won't do it.

This, I say to you, Speaker, is the dilemma for MPPs. MPPs do have the authority and the power to set their own salaries. I, for one, do not accept the proposition of delegating it to somebody else somewhere else. But I say this: When we do things like setting our salaries, we should do it in such a way as to not shock the sensibilities of the public, as to not outrage hard-working people out there. "Hey, I earn \$20,000 or \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year, and I've been waiting longer than you have. I don't have the power to increase my own salary," that low-income worker says. "I need your help to do it." Why can we drop partisan differences when it comes to self-interest but not when it comes to minimum wage?

1600

Mr. Levac: I appreciate the opportunity. The member for Lanark–Carleton offers us sage advice, as he is now the co-dean of this place—not "codeine" as in cough medicine, but "co" as in sharing the talents of himself and my friend Jim Bradley.

Just a point I want to echo, and maybe he can comment on it: In the past 16 years, there's been a 5.8% increase in this place, because you have to include the two cuts, the freezes and the two increases, so an average of a 5.8% increase over 16 years. That's a long time, an awfully long time, to have a 5.8% increase when everyone else is still going up.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I appreciate the comments that have been made by the member from Lanark–Carleton. He has been here a long time—a bit longer than me. He's the Chair of the committee I sit on.

I respect the work that he does. I'd ask him, though, when he talks about context and reality, to put this in some context and some reality.

He talked about the benefit package. Fair enough. I say, what about the benefit package for the workers at Tembec in Smooth Rock Falls who just got the terrible news that this is an indefinite layoff? The mill is not going to open again. What about the package for the workers at Cascades in Thunder Bay who have been given the news or given the pink slip? What about the workers at the sawmill in Nairn Centre who were told that they have no more employment, or the workers who used to bring the logs out of the bush into that mill and who lost their jobs in March of this year, or the workers at the Kenora paper mill who are out of a job, or the workers at the Dryden sawmill who lost their jobs when that went down? That list goes on and on and on and is directly linked to this government's hydro policy. I won't dwell on that, but that list goes on and on and on.

You want to talk about context? I don't think the public would mind at all a 3% or 4% increase, maybe, to catch us up over a number of years. But the reality is, we've got 4,000 forestry workers in northern Ontario who don't have a job anymore, and they pick up the paper and see this? I talked to a young woman last week who said to me, "Do you know that the increase you're going to get is bigger than my annual salary, and I'm working 40 hours a week?" I've got a problem with that; I really do.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

The member for Lanark-Carleton, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Sterling: I would like to also point out that—
Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I'd like to hear the member who has the floor, please.

The member for Lanark-Carleton.

Mr. Sterling: I would like to also point out what the compensation levels of this Legislative Assembly have done, in the words of our Integrity Commissioner: "Inadequate compensation over time works to devalue both the Legislative Assembly as an institution and the important responsibilities of its members." Further, "If the compensation arrangements at one level of government, such as those in place for members of the House of Commons, are substantially better than compensation arrangements in place provincially, there will inevitably be a movement from Toronto to Ottawa."

He also said that compensation arrangements should not be "a deterrent to those considering entering or staying in provincial public life."

I think the Integrity Commissioner has really captured it in terms of his report. It's unfortunate that our leaders in the past did not make incremental improvements to the benefit packages that we were receiving in 1990 and years beyond, but we are where we are and we must take action in order to ensure that this institution continues to attract quality people.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I'm pleased to take part in this debate today because I think this is an important debate for a number of reasons. For people who are at home who may be watching this, this is about the kind of pay raise that members of provincial Parliament in Ontario should receive. What the McGuinty government is proposing, when you add in all the numbers, is a pay increase in the range of 30%. It is the argument of the McGuinty government that a pay increase for MPPs in the range of 30% is appropriate in the times that we live in.

It is the position of New Democratic members of the Legislature and it is my position that a 30% holus-bolus pay increase is not acceptable. I think people at home need to understand this. This is not 30% phased in over four years or five years; it's not 4%, 4% and 4%. This is a holus-bolus increase of 30% in one year.

I want to put that in context. It is an increase of over \$27,000, when you add up all the numbers. Most of the residents of my constituency do not receive \$27,000 a year, never mind receive a pay increase of \$27,000 in one year. In fact, a number of people in my constituency have been told that they no longer have a job. They're taking a very significant pay cut. In fact, they're being told that the destruction of their job is permanent. Other people in my constituency are being told, "You want to keep your job? Work longer, work harder and work for less."

So that is the context of what is happening out there. I believe we always have to make these decisions in context. We always have to think of them in terms of the everyday life of ordinary Ontarians—what people are facing, what they're struggling with, what they're dealing with.

I really have a number of objections to the way the government has proceeded and what's involved, but I want to break them out because I think they all need to be explored and addressed. One of the problems I have with this legislation is the process, the procedure. You see, ordinarily, if this Legislature is dealing with legislation, a bill is introduced, there's first reading, then there's a vote. Sometimes that vote is a summary, a voice vote only, and sometimes it's a vote where members have to stand in their place. Then there is second reading debate—debate in principle. Then, most often, legislation goes out to committee for public hearings so that the public can have a say. I think that's the essence of democracy. After all, we are not a power here unto ourselves; we are here as representatives of the people. And if we're going to pass legislation, the people deserve a chance to be heard. They deserve a chance to have their views considered.

1610

Ordinarily, legislation will come for second reading. If it passes second reading debate, it will go out to committee. There will be public hearings. Sometimes the public hearings are held here at Queen's Park; sometimes they travel across the province. Then amendments are made and legislation comes back for third reading. So There's a fairly extensive process. In fact, the legislation

may actually be advertised and the public hearings may be advertised so that the public really does understand what is before the Legislature and the public will have a chance to have their say. Is the government proceeding with this legislation in this way? Absolutely not. The government is already indicating that it is not interested in public hearings. The government has already indicated that it wants to ram this legislation through before Christmas, when the legislation was only introduced—with no public statement, no indication the legislation was coming—last week.

What we have here is a government that is trying to usher through a 30% pay increase and trying to do it under the cover of Christmas, trying to do it with minimal involvement of the public, minimal opportunity for the public to know about it, to think about it, to have a chance to hold public hearings, to voice their approval or voice their concerns. This is legislation that is, shall we say, not receiving the full flourish of democracy. But this is a government that is trying to keep this issue off the public radar screen and, as I say, ram it through as quickly as possible with minimal public input and, they hope, minimal public attention.

In my view, that is not acceptable, especially when we are dealing, I would argue, with an issue which smacks of private interest, smacks very much of, shall we say, pecuniary interest of members of the Legislature. In that kind of situation, in my view, we need to open ourselves up to public scrutiny. We need to open ourselves up to public awareness. But that is not happening here today and it's not going to happen here the rest of this week. The government will employ a battering ram, and the government will do all that it can to avoid public scrutiny, avoid public hearings and avoid public attention to this issue. As I say, I think the process is wrong. Trying to use the cover of Christmas holidays and the Christmas recess to avoid public scrutiny in my view smacks of things that none of us should be proud of.

In contrast to the government's rush, the government's battering ram to get this legislation through, I just want to note some of the other legislation that has passed second reading and languishes while the McGuinty government acts with all haste and all speed and all tenacity to ram through this legislation. For example, there is Bill 164, the Community Right to Know Act, which would require disclosure of toxins and pollutants in everyday household products. This bill has passed second reading and is waiting for hearings. Is the government going to move quickly on this legislation? Not at all.

Or there is Bill 111, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, with respect to occupational diseases and injuries of firefighters, otherwise known as the Bob Shaw act. This passed second reading earlier this year. It is waiting for hearings. Is the government going to act on that in a speedy way? No; in fact, this bill will be lucky if it receives any public hearings or moves forward under this government.

Bill 150, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, which would raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour:

This legislation has also passed second reading and is waiting for hearings. Has the government acted on that? No, the McGuinty government seems not to be in any way in favour of moving forward on that legislation.

Bill 30, An Act to reduce the incidence of needlestick injuries in our hospitals and homes for the aged: We know that many, many nurses, many health care workers' own personal health and safety is at risk as a result of us not providing better needlestick prevention. This bill has received second reading and is overwhelmingly favoured by workers who work in the health sector in Ontario. Is the government going to move forward with this bill? Are they moving forward with even modest haste on this bill? No, not at all. But when it comes to a pay raise, the government is prepared to act with great haste and with no consideration of public hearings.

Then there's Bill 126, which would create a jobs commissioner for Ontario and, we hope, would duplicate the good work done by the jobs commissioner in British Columbia in ensuring that manufacturing jobs, forest sector jobs—ensuring that the government has a strategy to reduce that job destruction and sustain many of those jobs which are at risk. Is the government prepared to move forward with that legislation? No, not at all.

I could cite other legislation. My colleague Mr. Prue, from Beaches–East York, sponsored a private member's bill which would ensure greater fire protection and fire safety from fires in homes and apartment buildings. It has the support of firefighters across the province. It has the support of those people who are expert in fire prevention and reducing damage and loss of human life and suffering from fires. Is the government prepared to move forward with that legislation? Not at all; no haste, no willingness on the part of the government to move forward.

Again I say, a part of my concern here is the hasty process, the desire on the part of the McGuinty government to ram through this legislation and hope that while people are focused upon Christmas and the holiday season, no one will notice this attempt to ram through a 30% pay increase.

I think there are substantive problems as well, and I now want to deal with those. I mentioned earlier that context is important. In that context I want to point out this: New Democrats are not opposed to a modest pay increase for MPPs. We've indicated on the record several times that we would be prepared to support a 2% or a 3% increase. We'd even be prepared to support a further 2% on that in terms of catching up with the cost of living, so overall a 5% increase. We also would be quite prepared—and I know Mr. Sterling, my colleague from Lanark–Carleton, spoke about this—to support a defined-benefit pension plan, because it's our belief that every worker should have a pension, that no worker should go into their senior years suffering from income insecurity. But it's important to note that what the government has brought forward is far more than a 31% pay increase and far, far less than a defined-benefit pension plan. So again, context is important. I could support a modest pay increase. I could support members of this Legislature being

allowed to join the Ontario public service pension plan. But this legislation doesn't provide for that. What it provides for is a very quick, holus-bolus money grab, in excess of \$27,000 a year. I do not think, in the context of what we see in Ontario today, that that can be justified.

1620

I want to address some of the arguments the government has put forward in support of this legislation. One of them, which I think is insulting to several people, is when the government says, if they don't drive up MPPs' salaries by 30%, and do it now, immediately, that somehow Queen's Park is going to empty, that somehow all the members here are going to run off and find another job or run off and find some other occupation. I just wanted to note a few things in relation to that.

We've had a number of by-elections over the last few years. I didn't notice any difficulty in terms of finding candidates to run in those by-elections. In fact, I remember the Premier appointing candidates so that he could avoid having nomination battles and having three or four people contest for the nomination. I haven't noticed, in any of the by-elections that we've held, that people suddenly scurry off the stage and say, "Oh, no, I'm not interested in seeking the nomination. I'm not interested in running to become a member of the Ontario Legislature." Again, a number of by-elections we've had just in the last few years and no evidence that suddenly people aren't interested in becoming a member of the Ontario Legislature.

The second point I'd make is this: Ontario MPPs are already paid more than members of the Legislature in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. There are eight other provinces, and MPPs in Ontario are already paid more than the members of the Legislative Assembly in those eight other provinces.

Now, if I'm going to take and believe the government's rhetoric about, "Oh, you'll become a farm team," then those Legislatures must already be empty. In fact, they just must have been empty for some time, because their pay, as I point out, is less than Ontario's pay. But those Legislatures are not empty. You don't see the members of those Legislatures running for the exits because they feel they are underpaid. In fact, we just saw that the Premier of Alberta stepped down. There wasn't one person who sought to replace him; not two; not three; not four but several people sought to replace the Premier of Alberta, a member of the Alberta Legislature, who gets paid less than we do here in Ontario. I hear the McGuinty government's rhetoric about, "Oh, we'll become a farm team," but there is no objective evidence anywhere to support that kind of statement.

I do believe that Premier McGuinty has a problem within his own caucus. I do believe that, because I know that before the last general election, in 2003, Dalton McGuinty went around the province seeking candidates and promising candidate after candidate that they would become members of a McGuinty cabinet. Lo and behold,

here we are nine months before an election and I know there are many, many members of the McGuinty caucus who have not received yet that promised cabinet position. So I think the problem the Premier has is this: He has a number of people whom he promised a cabinet position to and their cabinet position has not been realized, so the Premier has to find a quick way to, shall we say, mollify some of his members who are disappointed, aggrieved, and perhaps angry that they have not been included in the cabinet. What better way to do that than to bring forward legislation which says, "Oh, I couldn't give you a cabinet job, I didn't give you a cabinet job, but here is \$27,000 and it's happening quickly"? It's not \$27,000 spread over four years—5%, 5%, 5%, 5%—but right now, quickly, when people across Ontario aren't looking. If I may, I believe that is the real problem that is present, and it is a problem, really, for Premier McGuinty, based upon promises that he made to certain numbers of people and now promises that he has not fulfilled. So he wants the taxpayers of Ontario to provide him with the money to, shall we say, massage and mollify members of his own caucus who are less than happy.

That's all I'm going to say about that part of it. But I do want to note some other comparisons. I said earlier that, for example, in my constituency of Kenora-Rainy River, the majority of workers in my constituency will not receive \$27,000 a year, never mind receive a \$27,000 increase in one year. I want to put this in context. The average salary for a woman worker in Ontario is \$25,600 a year. That's \$25,600 a year for the average woman worker. What the McGuinty government wants to do is to usher in a holus-bolus, all-at-once pay increase of more than \$27,000, when the average woman worker in the province is paid only \$25,600 a year.

I said that context is important. I wonder what all those women workers—many of whom, to get an average, would be making less than \$25,600 a year—would think if we were simply to rubber-stamp this and whistle it through, as the McGuinty government and members of the Conservative caucus want us to do. I think that is unacceptable.

We also have to look at this from the context of what else is happening in the economy. What we know from Statistics Canada—and I think it's interesting—is that we're seeing a greater concentration of wealth in our society, so the wealthiest 20% of families now hold 69.2% of the total net wealth in Canada. That is up from 68.5%, which was the figure in 1999. That increase in share was entirely at the expense of the middle 20%, whose share dropped from 8.8% of wealth to 8.4% of wealth. In other words, what it says is the McGuinty government wants this \$27,000-a-year increase just as middle-income families are actually seeing their pay packages being reduced. Certainly they're not seeing pay increases of 30%. They're not seeing pay increases of 20%. They're not seeing pay increases of 10%. I would suggest they're not seeing pay increases of even 5%.

To put this in the context of low-income Ontarians, low-income workers, the reality is, if you look at what's

happening out there in the big picture, that the lowest-income people in our province are actually receiving less income now, relatively speaking, than they were receiving even five or six years ago. That is the context within which the McGuinty government wants to drive through, ram through, a \$27,000-a-year pay increase, a pay increase that is greater than, as I say, 30%.

1630

I want to raise some other issues in the context of this discussion. The other issues I want to talk about have to do with other provinces. I indicated earlier that eight of the other provinces have MPP pay scales that are less than Ontario MPPs—far less than Ontario MPPs. I think we need to look at, once again, the context here, the context of next door. Next door we have the province of Manitoba, where MLAs there do no less important work than we do and wrestle with the same kinds of difficult issues we wrestle with, but are paid far less than we are in Ontario—or Saskatchewan or Alberta or British Columbia. I think those are very important issues to think about in terms of the context.

I want to raise the general argument that somehow—and I think it's implicit in this government's argument—we should measure the worth of people by the size of their paycheques. We're starting to see that happening increasingly under the McGuinty government. Let me just give you an example. Six years ago in Ontario, the head of Ontario Hydro was paid about \$500,000 a year, and the people who worked under him, the vice-presidents and so on, were paid less than that. What have we witnessed under the McGuinty government? Well, we've witnessed that, for example, the departing head of Hydro One under the McGuinty government—his salary and bonus escalated to \$1.6 million. He received from the McGuinty government—actually he received this money from the hydro consumers of the province, but it was under the direction and auspices of the McGuinty government: People across the province paid a \$125,000 mortgage subsidy on his mansion in Oakville; hydro consumers of the province paid for him to have a luxury car; hydro consumers of the province paid for him every year to fly back to Australia on an all-expenses-paid vacation; then, finally, the people of Ontario were paying for him to hide about \$45,000 of his personal expenses on his secretary's credit card.

You'd wonder, why does somebody who has \$1.6 million in salary, who already has an annual vacation to Australia paid for, who gets a \$125,000 mortgage subsidy, who gets his expensive luxury car paid for by hydro consumers—why would someone like that have to hide \$45,000 of personal expenses on his secretary's credit card? I'll let the government explain that. But what it says to me is that this sense that you value a person by how large their paycheque is doesn't bear much truth when you look at Hydro One. Has performance improved at Hydro One? It's hard to tell by the people who live in my part of the province, who increasingly experience irregular and not very dependable delivery of electricity. It's hard to tell by the major employers who have been

put out of work in my part of the province because hydro rates have escalated through the roof under the McGuinty government.

So this argument that the McGuinty government wants to parlay out there—that somehow people should be judged by the size of their paycheque, and if only you increase the size of the paycheque, you're going to get better people—doesn't bear scrutiny at Hydro One. I would suggest that it doesn't bear scrutiny at Ontario Power Generation either. I would suggest it doesn't bear scrutiny at the Ontario Power Authority or the Independent Electricity System Operator. Under the McGuinty government, the pay of executives at all of these organizations has escalated to a minimum of \$600,000, most of it in excess of \$700,000 a year, and in some cases the pay scale has accelerated to \$1.5 million, \$1.6 million and \$1.7 million a year. If the McGuinty government is trying to argue that they're getting better people as a result of that, you certainly can't find it by the performance of the hydroelectricity system in the province. Just ask anybody who's paying the hydro bill every month and I'm sure they will fill you in on that.

The whole argument here, that somehow pay is the only thing that matters, that the amount of pay is the all-important issue, doesn't bear scrutiny. In fact, my sense is this: Most people who came here didn't care what the pay was, didn't pay any attention to what the salary structure was. People enter public life because they want to make a contribution to public life. They see issues that they feel need to be addressed. They see problems that need to be resolved. They see injustice or wrongs and believe that something needs to be done about it, and they recognize that one way you can make a contribution to that is to be elected and take part in the decision-making. But suddenly the McGuinty government wants people to believe that it's only and all about pay. Well, it is not only about pay. There are many reasons why people choose to come to this place, why people put their name up for nomination, why people put their name on the ballot. To simply argue that it's all about pay I think does an injustice to people who work in public life, not only in this province but across this country.

I said that context was very important in terms of looking at these issues. So one of the other issues that I want to deal with is the plight of the lowest-paid workers in the province. Everyone knows that minimum wage in this province is not a living wage. You could work at three minimum-wage jobs, one during the day, one in the evenings and one on the weekends; you could literally spend all of your waking time working for minimum wage in this province and you would not have a living wage. That is what we're seeing across the province. That is why the number of people going to food banks has escalated. That is why food banks say that they're not able to address all of the needs of all of the people coming to food banks. That's why we now have 122,000 people in this province who are waiting for affordable housing and, in the meantime, are either homeless or living in shelters or substandard housing or insecure

housing. We have a number of people in this province who simply, as the minimum wage now stands, do not have enough income to make ends meet.

1640

New Democrats proposed a modest increase to the minimum wage, to \$10 an hour. We suggested that that would at least approach a living wage in the province. Do you know what the response was of this government? The response of this government was that we couldn't afford a \$10 minimum wage, that a living wage for low-income workers was wrong, that it was the wrong time to do it and the wrong thing to do.

Context is important. It seems to me that what we should be debating here today, what we should be addressing here today and what we should be raising here today is the absolute need to increase the minimum wage to at least \$10 an hour so that working people would have a living wage and working people would be better positioned to make ends meet, to pay the rent, to put food on the table, and to look after their children. But at the same time that the McGuinty government proposes a 30% pay increase for itself, issues like the minimum wage have been pushed not onto the back burner; they've been pushed out the rear door. It is pushed as far away as this government can get it from the public agenda.

I'd just say that I'm not opposed to a modest increase in pay for MPPs. I and other New Democrats have indicated we could support a 2% increase, a 3% increase, even a 2% catch-up on top of that. I'm not opposed to a decent defined-benefit pension for MPPs. But this is not here; this is not part of this package. What this package is is a \$27,000 holus-bolus increase in one year.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hampton: I don't believe that can be justified. I don't think it can be justified in the current context of Ontario. I don't think it can be justified especially in terms of those workers who are being told, "You work longer, you work harder, and you work for less."

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Thurston, Thurston.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister of Health Promotion, order, please.

Mr. Hampton: If members of the McGuinty government caucus want to stand up and speak in favour of their 30% increase, I invite them. Stand up and speak in the debate. Stand up and tell the people why you think a 30% pay increase for you is justified. I invite you to take part in the debate. But I sense that members of the McGuinty government want to shout from the sidelines and try to silence debate. There's an unwillingness on their part to get up and take part in the debate.

There are some other context issues that I think are important. One of the context issues that's important is—and if I may just speak for members of the Conservative caucus, Conservatives support the pay increase, but it was not so many years ago that Conservative members voted to get rid of a pension plan for members of provincial Parliament. I hope the Conservative members

today will stand and reconcile their different positions here, because it seems to me that members of the Conservative caucus who just a few years ago were arguing that members of the Legislature were overpaid and didn't deserve a pension plan now want the 30% increase and the increased contributions to—I won't call it a pension plan; I call it an RRSP arrangement. I would hope that the Conservatives would stand and reconcile their differing positions which have happened over the last few years.

I also want to raise the issue of people who are trying to survive on benefits of Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan. I think we need to put that in context too. The fact of the matter is that someone in this province who is disabled and forced to rely upon the Ontario disability support plan is not going to be seeing a 30% increase in benefit. They're not going to see a 20% increase in benefit. They're not going to see a 15% increase in benefit. They're not going to see a 10% increase in benefit. They're not even going to see a 5% increase in benefit; not a 3% increase in benefit. Those people, through no fault of their own, are disabled and are not able to be employed. It would seem to me that if we were operating from principle, shall we say, the McGuinty government would have come forward with a plan to increase those benefits, would have come forward with a program to increase those benefits. Is that happening? No, it's not happening.

Or the situation of Ontario Works: Ontario Works benefits were cut by over 22%, 10 years ago now, and not only were they cut by 22%, but had very little increase since that time. Yet we know that from the rate of inflation, the actual reduction, their loss of income, if you compare the position of people who have to rely upon Ontario Works, has been in excess of 35%. Has the McGuinty government, as a priority, come forward with a plan, with a program for even a modest increase in benefits for those lowest-income Ontarians? Do we see that here? Did we see it yesterday? Will we see it tonight? Will we see it tomorrow? No. No program whatsoever.

Another piece of context: The federal government, through the national child benefit, provides a supplement, provides a benefit, to the lowest-income children in Canada. If family income falls below a certain threshold, the federal government, through the national child benefit, ensures that those children and their families have their income raised. It is not a huge amount of money but, let me tell you, in terms of very-low-income families, it's a significant amount of money. What's important for people at home to realize is that this is the federal government providing this money to the lowest-income children in Ontario. What does the McGuinty government do? The McGuinty government claws back that money. It claws back that money from the lowest-income kids in the province. It claws back in excess of \$250 million a year from the lowest-income kids in the province. I would think that any government that comes forward and wants to ram through legislation giving

MPPs a 30% pay increase—more than a 30% pay increase if you factor in, down the road, some of the severance issues—would have a program, would have a definitive plan to end the clawback of \$250 million from the lowest-income kids in the province. Do we see that from the McGuinty government? Do we even see a hint, a quiet hint, a whispered hint, that that might happen? Not at all. It was promised. It was promised in the last election by the now Premier Dalton McGuinty. But now we're into the fourth year of the McGuinty government, and the McGuinty government continues to claw back \$250 million a year from the lowest-income children in the province at the very same time that the McGuinty government proposes to ram through a 30% pay increase for MPPs.

1650

Again, context is important. Context helps us sort through the promises, the platitudes, and get down to what is really happening. In my view, in the context of workers who are being told, "You work longer, you work harder for less," in the context of workers who have actually had their good-paying jobs destroyed, over 136,000 of them now under the McGuinty government, in the context of the lowest-paid workers who do not receive a living wage through minimum wage; in the context of unfortunate people who are forced to rely upon Ontario disability support plan benefits; in the context of people who are forced to rely upon Ontario Works benefits; in the context of the poorest, the lowest-income children in the province, who actually see the McGuinty government clawing back money from them, supporting a 31% pay increase for members of provincial Parliament and ramming through that kind of pay increase is, I would suggest, not supportable at all.

I actually had someone point out to me just a few days ago, and they were shocked, "I remember Dalton McGuinty promising many things in the last election. In fact, I've got a long, long list of all the things that Dalton McGuinty promised, most of which he hasn't followed through on, most of those promises he has broken, but I don't remember Dalton McGuinty promising a 30% pay increase for MPPs." This person said to me, "Gee, why doesn't Mr. McGuinty focus on carrying through the promises that he actually made rather than now substituting things that were not promised and that people would not have voted for?" I think that's a good point, I think it's a very good point, and one that the Premier and members of the McGuinty government would be wise to heed.

I want to conclude by just pointing out a little bit of history. The minimum wage in 1990 was \$5.40 an hour. By 1995, it had been raised to \$6.85 an hour. The problem, though, is that since 1995, inflation has eaten away most of that \$6.85 an hour. So just to put workers in relatively the same position that they were in in 1995—and again, context is important—we would need a minimum wage of \$10 an hour or more just to put workers, low-paid workers, minimum wage workers, in the context that they were in then. As I say to people, I was

hoping that we'd have some time this week to actually debate minimum wage. I was hoping the McGuinty government would come forward with a plan for minimum wage. But, sad to say, at the same time that the McGuinty government wants to ram through its 30%-plus pay increase for MPPs, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in terms of proposed increases for minimum wage.

When you look at the pay scales of other provinces, when you look at the pay scales—and this is another comparison the McGuinty government likes to make. They like to look at a couple of the larger cities in Ontario and say, "You have Mississauga, you have Toronto; therefore, we should be paid on a scale similar to them." But we have lots of other municipalities in this province and, let me say, the pay scales are nowhere in the \$100,000 range, the \$115,000 range, the \$120,000 range. So if the McGuinty government wants to use that context, then I would argue that the McGuinty government should look at it from the context of all of the municipalities, not just a few that it wants to select in terms of promoting and justifying a 30% pay increase.

One of the things we also have to consider in this Legislature is just generally the issue of public policy, because every time you do something, you create a precedent. Every time you take an action, you create a precedent that is then looked at by other bodies or is put up as an example to other bodies. I ask this question, really, of people across the province; I ask it also of the Premier: What does it say about public policy when a government says, "Oh, a 30% increase, here and now"? What example would other people in the civil service draw from that? What example would nurses draw from that? What example would physicians draw from that? What example would other workers, who may not work for the province but who may work for municipalities or other public agencies, other public institutions, draw from that?

If I may, in my view, that is why what we should be doing here today is debating an increase of 3%. I would even, as I say, support an increase of 5%. But the message that MPPs send, that the McGuinty government sends far and wide across Ontario by trying to ram through a 30% pay increase under the cover of Christmas and the holiday season, is not a good message. It is not a good message in terms of people's sense of fairness. It is not a good message in terms of people's sense of what public expectations should be. It is not a good message in terms of people's sense of responsibility, of accountability. It is not a good message in terms of precedents that people will cite in the future. And being done in the way that it's being done, as I point out, under cover of the Christmas holidays, the holiday season, it is not a good message in terms of transparency either.

Above and beyond the procedure, above and beyond context issues, one of the things that members of the Legislature have to concern themselves with is this: Is this good public policy? Is it good public policy to simply be saying, "Oh, a 30% increase, a \$27,000 increase," holus-bolus, all at once? I would submit that the

majority of people in Ontario, when they look at this, would say, "No, no, this is not a good precedent. This is not good public policy. This is not the example that we want to set for other public agencies. This is not the example that we want to set for the broader public sector. This is not the example that we want to set for young people. This is not the example that we want to set for society at large. This is not the way to do things."

1700

As I said earlier, I invite members of the McGuinty government to stand in debate and defend this 30% increase. I invite them to stand and defend literally taking \$27,000 and holus-bolus putting it in their pocket when we know that the average woman worker in the province gets paid \$25,600 a year. It's not a \$25,600-a-year increase; \$25,600 a year is the average salary of women workers in the province. I don't think there is any public policy justification. I don't think anyone could say that this is good public policy.

Again, talking about context, the government says, "Oh, if you look at other pay scales out there, MPPs deserve a lot more." I think the public needs to know this: Members of provincial parliament in Ontario today, without the pay increase, are in the top 10% of income earners in the province. Our all-in compensation is greater than \$100,000 a year, and that, measured across all the other income earners in Ontario, puts us in the top 10%. It's pretty hard to argue that somebody who's in the top 10% of income earners in the province is underpaid. It's hard to argue that somebody who's in the top 10% of income earners in the province is somehow facing hardship. It's hard to argue, but I invite members of the McGuinty government to stand—they have a lot to say in trying to silence other people—to get into the debate and try to tell us that somebody who is in the top 10% of wage earners and income earners is somehow impoverished, is somehow grossly underpaid, is somehow having a hard time making ends meet.

To put it in context, the increase that the McGuinty government is advocating would then put Ontario MPPs in the top 5%. That's quite a move, to already be in the top 10% of income earners and then, in a holus-bolus \$27,000-in-one-year increase, be put in the top 5% of income earners. When reasonable people across Ontario look at that and say, "Gee, you're already in the top 10% of income earners, and now you want a \$27,000-in-one-year increase to push yourself up to where you're in the top 5% of incomes in the province," I think most of them would say, "Boy, that's a lot." Again, from the perspective of public policy, is that a wise precedent for any government in Ontario, never mind the McGuinty government, to create?

Then put it in the context of the other pay increases that the McGuinty government has not only justified but revelled in. I look at the chair of the Ontario Energy Board, who just three years ago was being paid \$120,000 a year and now, under the McGuinty government, is being paid in excess of almost \$700,000 a year. When I added up the increase, I think it was a \$571,000 pay

increase in three years. Is that the precedent that the McGuinty government wants to set?

I think of the McGuinty government's dear friend Tom Parkinson, his \$600,000 bonus, the \$125,000 subsidy of his mansion in Oakville, hydro ratepayers of the province being forced to pay for his luxury car. All of these things are important. I simply say to people across Ontario: Does this sound like good public policy to you? Does it sound like this is the direction that Ontario ought to be going? Is this the kind of pay increase that the average worker in Ontario has any prospect of looking forward to? I think the average worker across Ontario knows the answer to that is no, no and no.

For all of these reasons—the wrong-headed process the government is using, the huge increase in one holus-bolus move, the perspective of public policy—we cannot support a 30% pay increase for MPPs under the McGuinty government.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Levac: I thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River, the leader of the third party, for his comments. I did a calculation. He said that he was doing it in the context of social justice. I'll offer him these remarks. In 16 years, there's been a total percentage increase of 5.8%, which translates into a 0.3% increase per year for a member. With the 17th year, the 35.8% that he seems to be adding on, I've added in the 5.8%, for a 17-year grand total of a 2.1% increase over the last 16 years.

Mr. Kormos: As I indicated, I've got time for Norm Sterling from Lanark–Carleton, although I disagree with the position he put forward. I've got to tell you, I've got time for Howard Hampton from Kenora–Rainy River, who's been here since 1987. I've got time for a whole lot of people in this Legislature who both advocate for the salary increase and who oppose it. But you know, folks watching this from the members' gallery and the visitors' gallery, listening to some of the heckling, have got to shake their heads and say to themselves, "These are the same people who want their salaries increased?"

I've got a hard time with people who were elected in 2003, who knew full well what their salaries were going to be, what their pay packages were going to be, and now seem to have joined the chorus of "Me first." I say to you, these same people who vowed that they were going to be different, who vowed that they were going to put their constituents first, who vowed that they were going to fight for the little people—and you know what? Most of them meant it when they said it. Most, if not all, meant it when they said it. Here's your chance, friends. Stand up and tell your government, Liberal backbenchers, to defer this bill until there's a parallel bill coming before this chamber increasing ODSP benefits, increasing social assistance benefits, increasing the minimum wage to the same percentage as you want to increase your own salaries. Show some courage. Show some leadership—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I have a couple of questions for the leader of the NDP that he seems to be avoiding in this

debate. Will Mr. Hampton and his entire caucus opt out of this program? A simple yes or no. If Mr. Hampton accepts—and he claims he wants to send the money to charities—will he accept a government-issued tax receipt? He was asked that question in a scrum this afternoon. It was like Bambi in the headlights. He didn't know what to answer. He was quite put off by that. Will he accept a government-issued tax receipt, thus gaining a benefit monetarily to himself? If he does commit to this charity plan, is it every year as long as he's an MPP, or is it a one-time photo op? Third, will he ensure that the official receipts for the charities he is giving the money to are released publicly every year to prove that he actually gave 100% of the money to the charity?

1710

Let me quote Christina Blizzard: "Let's not be hypocritical here. The NDP can rant all they like about the hike. They can pledge they'll give it to charity. A year from now, we'll all have forgotten those pledges. And who knows who'll have given what to the food bank?"

When I was mayor of the city of Ottawa, I was entitled to \$31,000 in severance at the end of my term. I chose not to accept that severance and not to accept the money and to pass it on to a charity. I had a resolution passed at city council. The money never touched my hands. It went directly—\$31,000—to the Union Mission. I did not benefit personally. The charity benefited.

I challenged Mr. Hampton to do the same thing with his money if he opts out of this program.

Ms. Martel: I want to focus on the process a little bit too, because I am interested in how rapidly this became a priority for the Liberal government. You see, if you go back to December 7, 2006—not 2005; December 7, 2006—this is what Greg Sorbara, the Treasurer of the province, told Canadian Press about the pay increase: "It's not something we're looking at for the current time. We've got other issues to deal with," said the Treasurer of the province of Ontario, who one assumes is speaking for the government when he speaks as Treasurer. But of course he wasn't the only one, because on December 13, 2006—not 2005, but December 13, 2006—here's what the government House leader had to say in the Niagara Falls Review: "'I don't anticipate you'll see any significant action on this at all' and that a large pay increase for MPPs 'is not going to happen.'"

Here we are, less than a week after those comments by Mr. Bradley, and oh, do we not have a rush on to ram through a pay bill in this Legislature just before Christmas, when I'm sure the government is hoping that people will be consumed with other things and won't notice what's going on. You see, it wasn't a priority less than two weeks ago but it sure is a heck of a priority now, and that's some process, considering all the other important legislation we should really be dealing with.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Kenora—Rainy River, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Hampton: I want to respond. First of all, I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for pointing out once again how reliable the McGuinty government is in

its pronouncements. A major pay increase is not a priority, according to the Minister of Finance and according to the government House leader, and, wham, all of a sudden a 30% pay increase is on the table. So I want to give members of the McGuinty government full marks for being just as inconsistent as they always are.

I also want to thank members of the McGuinty government for their grasping efforts to justify a 30% pay increase. What I see is that they will stop at nothing to justify what I think is a pay increase that most people across Ontario would look at and say, "Gee, in terms of process, gee, in terms of context and in terms of making good public policy for the province of Ontario, this is not right."

Members want to know what I will do. I've indicated that I have a choice. I can refuse the pay increase or I can donate it to charities, as Tommy Douglas did, as Stanley Knowles did. Let me ask the member for Ottawa: What are you going to do with what will amount for you to be about a \$50,000 increase? Put it in your own pocket? Is that what you're going to do? I have indicated that I will either contribute it to charity or I will refuse it. So I return the favour to the McGuinty government member from Ottawa: Are you going to deny people on minimum wage an increase? Are you going to tell the poor that you're going to take more money from them while you pocket—

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Order.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Kenora—Rainy River, I don't think you want to use that language. Well?

Mr. Hampton: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate? The member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. DiNovo: Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: One second. Just in all fairness, in rotation I was rather quick, but I think you are the next one to stand. Okay. I was a little quick on that.

Ms. DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I want to say that this is the time of year when all of our faiths, and I know there are at least one or two people of faith in this chamber, call for generosity to the poorest among us. I'm sure that the symbolism is not lost on the viewers at home, that this is the time of year that Dalton McGuinty's government chooses to ram through a 30% increase not for people on Ontario Works, not for people on ODSP, not for minimum wage earners, where we're asking for a 25% increase—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We are going to have order. I think it's time that we listened to the person who has the floor, and at this time it's the member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. DiNovo: Not, as I continue, for people on minimum wage are we asking for a 25% increase. No. The Dalton McGuinty Liberals, at this time of year, when all people of faith call for generosity to the poorest among us, are planning on feathering their own nests to the tune of a 30% increase.

It's very interesting that they brought this bill forward at a time when I had invited to the members' galleries about 80, I believe, members of the Toronto Association for Business Improvement Areas—small business owners, retailers, those people who own ma-and-pa stores, who are struggling, who are working hard and who are the major generators of jobs in this province. I went over to the members' gallery and said, "You're going to witness an historic moment. You're going to witness a government giving itself a huge pay increase, one that you're not privy to. In fact, you'll help pay for it."

Why were they here? They were here because of the unfair property taxes assigned to them. There's a resolution before the House on that. But it was appropriate that they witness it and they were appalled. I know that I'm not alone in receiving e-mails and communications from constituents about this very matter. And guess what? Not one e-mail in favour of the increase. All of the e-mails from my constituents are appalled and horrified that not only is this government giving themselves an increase, but they're doing it at this time of year.

I just want to set this in context. Today, the Ontario Workers Action Centre came to visit me in my office. I want to put this pay increase in context in terms of what other Ontarians are receiving this Christmas. First of all, they say, "A fair day's pay for a hard day's work?" "Not in Ontario. Not for the growing number of us pushed into jobs with low wages and lousy working conditions."

Let's talk about low wages. Almost 25% of Ontario workers are paid poverty wages of \$10 or less, but 31% of women and people of colour are found in these jobs. Wages stay low because the government keeps the legal minimum wage well below the poverty line. And where is my bill on the minimum wage? It's not being rushed through. It has gone through second reading, and we wait and we wait for the hearings on that bill and that that bill be seen in committee.

1720

"The government fails to enforce weak labour laws," they go on to say, "even though one in three employers violates our basic minimum labour standards"—one in three. "The government does little to protect workers. Fifty-nine million dollars of wages that the government ordered deadbeat bosses to pay workers went unpaid over the past three years. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Most employers don't get caught. Ninety-nine point nine per cent of employers found in violation of the law face no prosecution because we don't have enough employment standards officers to find them, catch them and prosecute them. Thirty-seven per cent of jobs are part-time casual or temporary with few, if any, employment rights. Employers are treating more workers as 'self-employed.' That's so they don't have to pay employment insurance, Canada pension or follow basic minimum wage and overtime laws. Big companies contract out work to smaller companies, letting them violate basic employment standards."

"In this new world of work," the Workers' Action Centre goes on to say, "outdated labour laws don't

protect workers. Ontario workers need a fair deal. Outdated labour laws and lack of enforcement are deliberate policies that trap people in poverty. But these policies can and should be changed." But are we changing them? No, we're not. What are we doing? Just before this holiday season, when all of our faiths ask us to be generous to the poorest among us, we're feathering our own nests, we're giving ourselves a raise.

I've listened to the descriptions that have been put forward about the work that we do here at the Legislature. We've been called good, worthwhile, intelligent, hard-working. We've been called brave, and this legislation to raise our salaries has been called brave. Mr. Speaker, I would ask you, there are a number of people in my constituency, and I'm sure in other constituencies, who should be described that way as well. I think, for example, of child care workers, elementary school teachers, social workers, paramedics. I think of the small business owners and retailers, and I think of artists who, by the way, make on average about \$27,000 a year, about the same as our raise—not our salary, but our raise.

I think of all of those groups of people who watch in horror as this piece of legislation takes priority over everything else at this time of year—over everything else. We're sitting in this House to discuss this piece of legislation, not pieces of legislation that might help the poorest among us. We're not talking about ending the national child supplement clawback that would give poor children about \$1,500 extra a year. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about, say, housing. There are 122,000 families waiting for housing in this province, 65,000 in the GTA alone. We're not talking about housing initiatives that we could sit and do overtime on. No, we're not talking about that. We're not talking about enforcing employment standards, as you heard the Workers' Action Centre call for. We're not talking about raising the minimum wage, as I've already said. We're not talking about any of that. We're talking about raising our own salaries, at what a time. I hope all of those watching at home get the symbolism of this, the symbolism that says whether you're Muslim or Jewish or Hindu or Sikh or Christian, at this time of year we're not sharing our wealth with the poorest among us. No, what we're doing is we're giving ourselves a nice, fat raise.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the reasons, and you heard Mr. Hampton talk about them, but let's talk about the reason that we have qualified people, we need qualified people and that qualified people won't be attracted to this job unless we pay them the upper 5% of what anybody in Ontario makes. We should be insulted. My honourable colleagues and I should be insulted by that suggestion. Aren't we here out of a sense of duty and public service? Is that not what motivates us to stand here, to speak, to pass bills? Are we here for the money? Is that why we're here? I hope not. I hope we're not here for the money. You've heard my colleagues say that we would be happy with an increase that was reasonable. We would be delighted with a pension plan. Everyone needs a pension plan. But 31%, not to speak about the wonder-

ful little packages we get when we leave? A 31% raise just at this time of year, when we're called to be generous to the poorest amongst us?

It's interesting that, of course, in this cynical environment where we're only motivated by money and we're worth 75% of a federal colleague—I love that description. We're worth 75% of a federal colleague because we might be paid 75% as much. Is this what human endeavour has come down to? Is this what public policy and making public policy and serving the public has come down to? I used to be a United Church minister, and to all the pastors and priests who are working so hard at this time of year, I'd like them to know, if they are watching right now, that their work is worth nothing. Their work is worth nothing in terms of the McGuinty government. Why? Because they get paid very little. All the pastors and priests out there who are working so hard at this time of year, their work has no value in the province of Ontario, according to the McGuinty government, because they don't make a lot of money. They're not in the top 5% of all earners. They shouldn't be delighted by serving the public. They shouldn't be delighted by helping the poorest amongst them. No, because they don't make enough money, and after all, we measure human dignity by the amount of money we make. Is that so? Is that what this government is saying, that human dignity is measured by the amount of money you make? I think that's a very sad statement, especially at this time of year, when we are called to be generous to the poorest among us. We're all called to do that, no matter what our beliefs.

And then I want to deal with the very cynical, the most cynical suggestion of all, that, "Well, if we're not going to vote for this bill, if we don't agree with the 31% increase at this time of year, then all we should do is just opt out." My response to that is this, I'm not going to leave this money with this government; they'll only spend it on themselves. I'm going to take that money and give it to these people: Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre, West End Angels, Second Harvest, Daily Bread, Saint Vincent's, St. Francis Table and the Redwood shelter. I'm going to take the increase from my paycheque and I'm going to document it for Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Watson. I'm going to take photos. There will be a photo-op every time I hand my cheque over, which I will deliver happily to all the members opposite in case they question my credibility. I'm going to say to them—

Interjections.

Ms. DiNovo: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that Mr. Wilkinson listen. I would ask that they listen. I know it's not a skill that's developed—

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Parkdale-High Park, I can't make them listen. I can only try and make them be quiet when they don't listen.

Mr. Kormos: And they want more money.

Ms. DiNovo: Absolutely.

So it will be very transparent. You'll see exactly where my money is going, exactly where it's going, and I'll show you the photos. What I would suggest that this

government do if they want to keep pace with New Democrats on this is to give some of their money to those who make minimum wage by increasing the minimum wage, to give some of their money to those who are receiving Ontario Works and ODSP, who have been waiting for an increase, waiting for that 21.6% increase that they deserve. I challenge this government to give money to the housing projects.

Do you know what? Here is a very interesting thing for those people at home. If they just took the money that they are going to earmark for this increase, here are some of the things they could do with that money at this time of year for the poorest among us. They could build housing units, 100 to 200. Wouldn't that be a nice Christmas present or holiday present for a number of families of the 122,000 waiting for housing units?

They could go to those 13,500 children who are using food banks in the GTA and they could give that increase directly to those families. Wouldn't that be a nice present at this time of year? That's something you could do. They could take this money and start giving back the national child supplement that they claw back to some of the poorest. That's \$1,500 a year per child. That would be a wonderful thing for this government to do at this time of year.

1730

Again, what we're arguing for here is simply a rational response and a generous one of this government to the poorest among us at this time of year.

There, Mr. Speaker. I hope I've satisfied some of their concerns about all of this. I challenge them again to overcome their cynicism, to overcome their stance as the Grinch who stole Christmas, to overcome the desire to feather their own nests, to buy themselves new cars, to build a new wing on their houses. I would challenge each one of the government members opposite and our Tory colleagues to the side to do what we're all called to do at this time of year, and that is to think of those poorest among us and to be sitting here in this Legislature not talking about their own raise but talking about raises where they're absolutely needed the most.

Just to outline in case anybody missed it, a 25% increase to the minimum wage from \$8 to \$10—simply that; simply give back the national child supplement, simply end the clawback, \$1,500 a year per child; simply reform the tax base so that small business and retailers can actually enjoy their holidays as well; simply enforce the Employment Standards Act so that all of those employed out there in Ontario can actually get their paycheques, can actually be paid appropriately, can actually collect what they're duly owed, to simply do that.

Perhaps hire some new employment standards officers. That would make a lot of people happy and create some jobs at this Christmastime. Perhaps they could look at a lot of the housing issues that beset those who are poorest among us. Perhaps they could do what they promised and create \$300- to \$400-per-month units so that the poorest among us could live somewhere. Two

people a week will die on the streets of Toronto this winter. If other winters are any indication, that's what's going to happen: Two people a week will die. This is life and death that we're talking about here.

I challenge this government: Why don't you do something for them? After all, all our faiths teach that at this time of year we are to be generous with the poorest among us. People who have no place to live, who are about to die on the streets of our major city—surely they count as the poorest among us. Maybe we should take some of the time, which is so precious in this Legislature, we've heard, to actually focus on them. Maybe we should do that.

Perhaps we could look too at those people who make life worth living—the artists among us, the musicians, the filmmakers, the writers. They were all here in the members' galleries not too long ago, a week back or so. Maybe you could look at raising them out of poverty and doing something for the artists among us. After all, their average annual salary is about \$27,000, about the same as the raise we're all going to get. Maybe we should do something about status-of-the-artist legislation so that these artists can raise themselves out of poverty. These are the people who delight us and make our lives worth living. Maybe that would be a nice wish for this time of year, for people of faith, for people in this Legislature who want to do the right thing—not the selfish thing but the right thing. Maybe we should ask for that as well.

Maybe we should think about all of those people out there who do brave, honest, hard work, work that's just as brave, just as honest, just as hard as the work that we do here. I'm thinking of the social workers, the educators in our midst, those who work in the health services, the small business owners, the priests and pastors I spoke about who don't expect a huge salary to help others to do the hard, hard work that they're called to do, often from dawn to dusk. Maybe we should think about all of those people out there and work for something other than money, work for the joy of public service, work for the joy of actually being able to make those other people's lives just a little bit easier at this time of year. Maybe we should be a little bit less cynical, a little bit less grinch-like, a little bit less selfish, a little bit more generous with all of those out there in our constituencies, all of those sending us e-mails who are horrified and appalled at this waste of their money. Maybe what we should do is think of others, not of ourselves, at a time of year we're called to do exactly that: to think of others, not ourselves. I hope we do that.

My personal holiday wish—dare I say, my Christmas wish—is that all the members here stop to think just for a moment about the poorest among us and, instead of spending time here on how to give ourselves a raise, think about how to give them a raise in this season.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Levac: I accept the member from Parkdale–High Park's sermon. With respect, I reject that no member in this place thinks like she does.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I too want to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for a very good presentation as it relates to the spirit of the season and the fact that we should all be doing what we can for the less fortunate in our society. Having said that, I don't believe that's really the issue in this bill, but I do thank her for the presentation.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I was expecting to hear more from my colleagues on behalf of the member from Parkdale–High Park. I listened to her with great interest, first of all, because she was very forceful and very articulate. It was easy for me to tell that she had come from being a minister to this House. She spoke very candidly and openly and honestly about her constituents, about the poverty that afflicts her community. She talked about the need to minister to poor people and about what all of the great religions have to teach us.

There are some here who will think that this is not a subject that should be conveyed in this particular Legislature, but I would beg to differ. Some of the great orators of our time, some of the great people who have stood up in this Legislature and in the House of Commons, have originally been people of the ministry, people who got drawn into politics to try to make a difference—not for everyone and certainly not for the rich, but for those who were most in need: the poor, the downtrodden. I think of all of those people and what she had to say here today, and I have to tell you that it hit home for me. It is the reality and the truth that she lives; it is the reality and the truth that she believes. And she believes it strongly enough to challenge the members opposite and to promise to do something that I think very few of us would do, and that is to lay bare our whole life and our whole financial situation and to lay bare where she is going to put that money. I commend her for what she has to say and I thank her for making her words and her deeds come from her heart.

Mr. Kormos: In two minutes' time, after the member for Parkdale–High Park has had a chance to give her two-minute response, we're going to be hearing from Shelley Martel, the member from Nickel Belt, who has invested a big chunk of her life in her work here at Queen's Park.

I join others in applauding and congratulating the member from Parkdale–High Park for putting this in perspective. Look, out there with the folks across Ontario, it's not the money; it's the attitude. It's the "Me first" that Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals are expressing.

Walking back to the apartment on Thursday, I stopped in the supermarket; I'm going to tell you this story again. I was at the checkout counter and a woman 60 or 65 years old said to me, "Can you stop them?" I didn't know what she was talking about for a minute. I said, "Huh?" She said, "Can you stop the pay raise?" I said, "No, I don't think so. There are only nine of us. The government, with its majority, will impose it if they really want to." She said, "Look, I work here because I have to, because I've got to buy groceries. That's what my income

at \$7.75 an hour pays for.” And she said, “You know, they don’t even provide ballpoint pens. I’ve got to bring my own pen, like the other workers do.” She was hurt, frustrated, angry, disappointed. She felt that, at the very least, elected officials at Queen’s Park could have done something about her \$7.75-an-hour wage before they granted themselves a huge salary increase. Where, she thought, was all the collaborative effort when it came to increasing minimum wage—but we saw it oh, so obviously, when it came to increasing MPPs’ salaries.

So don’t answer to me; answer to the woman working at the checkout at that supermarket at \$7.75 an hour.

1740

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Parkdale–High Park, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. DiNovo: I just wanted to respond to a couple of the queries and the challenges that I heard from members opposite. One of them was about the minimum wage, and I say, that would be a wonderful measure, that the government support a raise—it’s really catch-up; it’s not really a raise because, as I said, in 1972 it was \$2. That would be just under \$10 an hour right now. So a catch-up in minimum wage to \$10 an hour would be wonderful.

It would be wonderful if they stopped the clawback of the national child supplement.

It would be wonderful if we all acted in the spirit of Tommy Douglas, who was voted the greatest Canadian by CBC listeners across Canada. What Tommy always did with his raises was to donate them to charity.

I also reject the very cynical assertion by the Liberal government that people give to charities for the tax benefit. I challenge them all to denounce anyone who says that, particularly at this time of year, when charities go begging, literally, for donations and appeal to the most altruistic senses among us and to those who are generous. So please, don’t let us hear that again, that people give to charities simply for the tax benefits to themselves. That’s horrendous.

Again, all we’re asking here is time to think, as well that this bill go to committee, that people have a chance to give their input—this is a democracy, after all—that we hear from all of Ontario on this issue. And I can tell you what you will hear from all of Ontario on this issue. They will say what I say: At this time of year, to consider such a move is abhorrent to most Ontarians, and we ask that, at the very least, it go to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It’s a pleasure for me to participate in the debate today. I want to focus my remarks on, really, the contradiction on how suddenly this became a priority for the government when I think the government should have so many other different priorities, especially given what is happening in the province today.

I said in my two-minute response before, and I’ll just repeat it, that this 31% pay increase wasn’t a priority for the government less than a week ago. The Minister of Finance—who, I assume, represents the government; after all, he is the Minister of Finance—when asked if the Liberals had a plan to increase wages beyond CPI, said

the following: “It’s not something we’re looking at for the current time. We’ve got other issues to deal with.” I wish that were the case. But it is the case that this week we are dealing with the pay raise. He said that on December 7. Or, as recently as December 13, 2006, the government House leader, who has been here a long time and whom I have enormous respect for, told the Niagara Falls Review the following: “I don’t anticipate you’ll see any significant action on this ... at all.” A large “pay increase for MPPs is not going to happen.” That was the position of the Treasurer of the province of Ontario last week. It was the position of the government House leader last week. And here we are, with the session extended by a week, dealing with a bill that essentially provides MPPs with a 31% pay increase.

I think that Mr. Sorbara was right. I think the government had other priorities, had other issues to deal with. And I sincerely regret that we are not here to deal with these issues. Let me tell you and let me put on the record what I think some of those are. First of all, this government should fully end the clawback of the national child benefit. It is a disgrace that we are here talking about a significant pay-increase proposal at the same time as this government, in its fourth year of government, still has not ended the clawback of the national child benefit for the poorest families in Ontario. After all, this is what Dalton McGuinty had to say on July 31, 2003, when he sent this letter to June Callwood and Rabbi Arthur Bielfeld of the Campaign Against Child Poverty: “Poverty, and especially child poverty, is an issue we take very seriously. Taking concrete measures to eradicate it will remain a top priority for us, whether we are the official opposition or the government.”

He went on to say, “My team and I oppose the Conservative government’s practice of clawing back the national child benefit ... a practice we will end during our first mandate.”

I’ll bet June Callwood didn’t think the Premier meant “maybe by the end of the fourth year in government.” I’ll bet she didn’t think that at all. But here we are, with the government in its fourth year, and all this government has managed to do for the poorest families in Ontario is to give them the inflationary increase of this federal benefit.

I remind people who are watching and I remind members in this House that this isn’t provincial money; it’s federal money, for goodness’ sake, that is designed to take Ontario families out of poverty. And you claw it back from the poorest families in the province. You claw it back. You claw back \$250 million from these poorest families. That’s the track record on the national child benefit.

I get offended when I hear the government use the following excuse: They can’t end the benefit now because the federal money they claw back from those families is money that pays for other programs for kids. Do you know what? We all knew that before the government made the promise that it did, before Mr. McGuinty wrote this letter to June Callwood and said that we

oppose that clawback. We all knew where that money was going because reports were annually produced that showed where the money was going that the former Conservative government was clawing back and that you claw back from the poorest families.

Here's the 1999 Ontario municipal report, which lists, community by community, what programs are being funded through the NCB clawback. Here's the report for 2000, which lists, community by community, how much money that is clawed back from the poorest families is going to different organizations in the province, run through the municipalities. It was no surprise and no secret that that's what the money was used for. We all knew that. It is offensive for this government to stand in its place and defend the ongoing practice started by the Conservatives, continued under the Liberals, to claw that money back from the poorest of the poor and say, "We can't do otherwise because municipalities rely on that money to provide programs at the local level." Dalton McGuinty knew that when he made the promise, and it is indefensible to use that as an excuse today.

I've got to give credit to the Sudbury and District Health Unit, because in May 2006, after the budget, they sent this letter to the Premier:

"In the budget speech of 2006, the government of Ontario indicated that it is interested in increasing opportunities for every Ontarian"—"every" highlighted. "Related to this goal, the Sudbury and District Board of Health at its April 20 meeting passed the following motion:

"Whereas the number of clients with low incomes served by the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program is significant; approximately 5,000 Sudbury-area families (11%) lived in poverty in the year 2000; and the proportion of Ontario children in low-income families was about 12.9% in 2004; and

"Whereas, in the 2006 provincial budget speech, Premier McGuinty did not end the clawback of the national child benefit ... given to each province to distribute to children in low-income families; and

"Whereas families receiving social assistance will only receive the federal government's increases to the national child benefit supplement, (about \$20 per month ...), but continue to miss out on about \$100 per child per month;

"Therefore, be it resolved that Premier McGuinty identify child and family poverty as a health issue that should be addressed; and

"Further, that the McGuinty government fully end the clawback of the NCBS, so that families receiving social assistance receive the full amount allocated per child, while resources are maintained for existing early childhood support programs which are funded through the clawback."

1750

Good for the Sudbury and District Health Unit; good for the other municipalities across Ontario that have written to this government and said, "End the clawback now."

I regret that as we sit this week, we are not dealing with a policy issue that would fully end the clawback and do it now. No, we are here dealing with a proposal for an extremely significant pay increase at the same time that the government can't find the financial wherewithal to end the clawback from the poorest families in the province.

Why isn't it a priority for the government to live up to the election promise it made with respect to those seniors who are in long-term-care homes? The government said, during the last election, "Invest in better nursing home care, providing an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident." In the fourth year of the McGuinty Liberal government, we're nowhere near having the government put that kind of money on the table to deal with some of the most vulnerable seniors in our province, those who live in long-term-care homes.

This is what the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors had to say after the last budget: "Over the last three budgets, the Liberal government has raised the amount of annual funding going directly to care by about \$2,000 per resident. This compares to a promised increase of \$6,000—a promise made by the Liberals during the last provincial election.

"The Liberals told us that seniors' issues, and long-term care in particular, were priorities. Why then wasn't this an important item in the budget?" said Donna Rubin, CEO of OANHSS.

"OANHSS estimates that the funding shortfall in the sector is now \$450 million a year." The release went on to say, "Unless the funding shortfall is addressed, the level of care will continue to be inadequate. For example:

"—Residents now receive about two hours of nursing and personal care over a 24-hour period. OANHSS believes that this level is unacceptable and should be closer to at least three hours."

Point 2: "Homes are not able to provide anywhere near the level of rehabilitation and restorative care that residents need."

Point 3: "Only a small fraction of residents currently receive professional mental health services, even though 65% have Alzheimer disease or some other form of dementia.

"Other groups and organizations across the province have also been calling on Queen's Park to keep its \$6,000 promise. These have included:

"—municipal governments such as: the regions of York, Peel, and Waterloo; the cities of North Bay and Windsor; and the counties of Brant, Dufferin, Essex, Frontenac, Grey, Lambton, Renfrew, and Simcoe....

"—a number of seniors groups, including: Canadian Pensioners Concerned, Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities, Ontario Association of Residents' Councils, Ontario Society (Coalition) of Senior Citizens' Organizations, and the United Senior Citizens of Ontario Inc."

All of these organizations, many of whom represent some of the most frail and elderly who live in long-term-care homes, know that this government is about one third

of the way to meeting its election commitment in the fourth year of the government. They know that this government experienced a \$3-billion windfall in the last budget in March 2006, yet the government can't seem to find the funding necessary to meet the election promise that it made to families and residents in long-term-care homes. Not only can they not meet the financial commitment, they now don't want to meet the promise they made of reinstating the minimum standard of hands-on care of 2.25 hours of care per resident per day.

I think that should be a priority for this government to deal with. If we're going to be sitting here this week, maybe we should be addressing that election promise and ask the government why they can't seem to find the money to meet the \$6,000-per-resident promise but seem to have money available for a very substantial pay raise for MPPs who, as we've already heard, are already in the top 10%, in terms of income bracket, in the province of Ontario.

If the government wanted to look at priorities, they could look at the priority of getting rid of the waiting list for children who have autism, who need intensive behavioural intervention, because it is under this Liberal government that that wait list has grown exponentially. There were 89 children on the wait list for IBI treatment after the first six months that these Liberals were in office—89 on the wait list for IBI. By March 31, 2005, the list of autistic kids waiting for IBI treatment was 399. By March 31, 2006, 753 children had been assessed as eligible for IBI and are languishing on a waiting list, praying for service. And meanwhile, some of their families are going broke trying to finance what is a very expensive treatment. Some other families don't have the financial wherewithal at all to even consider trying to put in place a program for IBI for their children as they wait on that list and don't get services.

So many of these kids, if they received this treatment in a timely fashion, would experience such a tremendous difference in their lives. In the last four years that I've had the privilege of working with a number of these families, I have seen the enormous difference this treatment makes for these children. That has made a difference even after they were six, even though there are some ministers in this government who try to say otherwise. In fact, many of the families I dealt with were only able to provide IBI, because of their financial circumstance, after their kids turned six, and still those children made enormous gains.

This is a government that watches kids languish on a waiting list for IBI. It's a government that has spent millions of dollars fighting these families in court. Do you know that for the last 18 months I have been trying to get, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, the amount of money that has been spent by the government fighting these families in court—over 18 months now. It started as an order paper question, then started at freedom of information, then went to mediation, now is at arbitration, and we are waiting for a ruling from an arbitrator as to whether or not some of this information is going to be

disclosed. And I have no doubt that the reason this government has fought me every step of the way from getting that information is because it will show that millions, literally millions, of dollars were spent, first by the Conservative government and then by the McGuinty Liberal government, to fight the Deskin and Wynberg families in court.

Not only have they fought those families in court, but this government has also spent hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting a whole group of other families, over a hundred in total, before the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has, in its findings, said very clearly that this government, in the case of Luke Burrows, who is the first child whose complaint was heard, indeed discriminated against Luke Burrows on the basis of his age and disability when they cut off his IBI treatment when he turned six. That happened under the Conservatives. That case is still going on at the Human Rights Tribunal today under the Liberals. And most days, when the tribunal sits, the government has no less than four lawyers—four lawyers—from the Attorney General's office sitting at the tribunal.

I can't imagine what the cost of that is, just for the tribunal hearings alone. And hopefully, after I get information about how much the court case cost, I'll then be able to use that decision from the arbitrator to find out how much both governments—first the Conservatives, then the Liberals—have spent trying to block families at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

We have 753 kids on a waiting list right now. They've qualified for service. They can't get it. You've got families who are going into financial ruin trying to pay for IBI: second mortgages, fundraisers, borrowing from family, doing whatever it takes to try to pay for a program for their kids while they wait for government funding. Most families who have autistic children and are languishing on the waiting list can't even afford to do that.

I would have hoped, since this government made very specific promises to families who have kids with autism in the last election—very specific promises about ending this discrimination, about funding IBI, about making sure that IBI was provided in schools, which it still is not—that we could have used this week and dealt with that as a government priority, because I've got to tell you, as someone who has worked with these families for a long time, that it really is a priority, and it is a shame that we haven't dealt with it as a priority yet.

There are many other issues that we could have been dealing with this week; there are many other issues that I could raise that I think should involve the government in terms of priorities. I don't have to go again into the whole minimum wage, but if you want to talk about people really working hard, I'll tell you, the people who really work hard in the province of Ontario are those people who are working on the minimum wage, full-time, and still live in poverty, still live under the poverty line. Those are folks who are working hard, and the little

that this government is prepared to do for them, which still won't get them out of poverty, is a disgrace for all of us. It is a shame for all of us that the people who are working the hardest, struggling on the minimum wage and still living in poverty, can't expect a living wage in the province of Ontario in the year 2006. That should be a priority that we're dealing with here today.

I just want to close by saying we need to take this in context. I don't think the general public would bat an eye at all if we were looking at a 3% or 4% increase, even if we did that over a couple of years, to move the pay up. But I don't believe that most of the public can accept a 30% increase in one fell swoop for a group of folks who,

frankly, aren't doing that badly at all. We are in the top 10% of income earners in the province, and I don't believe for a moment that in order to attract good candidates, we have to increase that pay to keep people in Ontario. If that were the case, then all those other Legislatures would be empty of MPPs now, because they all would have run to the federal government.

I don't accept this pay increase. I think it's—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. It being past 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1803.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Lundi 18 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

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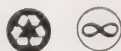
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 18 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 18 décembre 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to have a motion moved dealing with this evening's debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Is there a unanimous consent to deal with the debate? I heard a no. Perhaps if that could be stood down, then. I think there might be some confusion here.

Orders of the day.

MUNICIPAL STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS CONCERNANT LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Mr. Gerretsen moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 130, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 130, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): It's time for the minister to speak.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Scarborough Centre.

Tonight is indeed a very auspicious night, when we start third reading debate on Bill 130, which I believe will drastically change the way municipalities operate in Ontario.

As many of you and certainly many of the people out in—

The Acting Speaker: I'm having a hard time seeing you. There's quite the conversation going on immediately in front. Okay, please resume.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: As we all know, constitutionally set out in the British North America Act there are only two orders of government in Canada: the federal government and the provincial government. Over the last 150 years or so, municipalities have basically been operating under the auspices of the provincial jurisdiction as set out in the British North America Act. Quite often in the past, they were referred to as creatures of the pro-

vince. By that, it's meant that all their powers, whatever they could do, were set out in provincial laws and regulations and could be changed at any moment by the province.

What we're proposing in this act is not to change the Constitution of Canada at all but to give due credit to municipalities and their councils, particularly the professionalism under which the vast majority of councils and municipalities operate in this province of Ontario, and recognize them as mature orders of government. During the hearings that took place after this bill was given second reading, the standing committee on general government met with a number of different organizations and deputants—as a matter of fact, there were 37 of them—and heard a variety of viewpoints as to what should or should not be contained in the act. As a result of that, 55 motions were brought forward, some directly as a result of the deputations that were made to the committee. Some of the motions were put forward by the opposition parties as well that were agreed to by the government, because they basically strengthened the bill. So, first of all I'd like to thank all of those individuals and organizations that made deputations during the legislative hearings for the positive input that they had in the process.

The whole emphasis behind the act is to give municipalities greater autonomy, whereas in the past the bills, the various municipal acts, have always given powers to municipalities in a very prescriptive way as to what they couldn't do or what they could do under certain circumstances. The attitude that this bill brings forward is to make the act a lot more permissive. In other words, there are broad areas within the new Municipal Act where municipalities, if they so wish, can use the powers provided for under the act to pass bylaws that basically affect the health and welfare of their citizens.

1850

I think the bill as a whole recognizes the fact that municipalities and their councils play an extremely important role in the day-to-day lives of Ontarians and, I would dare say, play as important a role as the provincial and federal governments do at their levels. That's why we have been starting to talk about it being truly an order of government, the municipal order of government. Bill 130 creates a framework of broad powers for the municipality that balances the current and future interests of the province and all Ontario municipalities.

We as a government recognize that municipalities are responsible and accountable governments and that they

are given powers and duties under Municipal Act, first of all in the significant changes that took place in 2001, for the purpose of providing good government. We are building on the foundations that are set out in the act of 2001.

The intent is to help municipalities across the province ultimately serve their residents better by providing them with the power to do the following.

First of all, in the area of bylaws, is to give them broad power to pass bylaws so municipalities can respond quickly to local issues.

Secondly, it will have a new authority, subject to certain restrictions, to delegate legislative and quasi-judicial matters to local bodies, such as community councils, which can deal with very local issues that only affect, perhaps, a certain part of the municipality.

The act also gives municipalities licensing powers which they have not had before: a broad authority to license and regulate business, including the authority to impose administrative monetary penalties for failure to comply with the licensing system and, in certain circumstances, suspend business licences without a hearing.

Next, it's giving municipalities broad authority to establish service corporations within the municipalities in most service areas. Of course, where there is an overriding provincial interest, these corporations would be subject to provincial regulations. For example, municipal economic development corporations can perform activities such as the re-development of sites, providing residential housing, and constructing and operating performing arts facilities and heritage institutions in a much less restrictive manner than is currently the case.

Municipalities also will be provided with greater revenue tools and more flexibility to use those revenue tools in such areas as user fees, local improvement charges and area rating—again to a much greater extent than is currently the case.

The enforcement mechanism has been strengthened. It will enable municipalities to pass bylaws which strengthen enforcement abilities, such as administrative right of entry, search warrants and ability to set higher fees.

It will also enable municipalities to better protect affordable housing stock by giving councils the power to pass bylaws to control the demolition of rental housing or the conversion to condominiums.

There was also a change made which was particularly of interest in the rural areas of our province with respect to the Line Fences Act, so that owners of abandoned railway rights-of-way are responsible for the full cost of providing a line fence only when requested to do so by abutting farm businesses.

We as a government recognize that municipalities are responsible and accountable governments and that they were given powers and duties under the Municipal Act, initially, in 2001. And, as I mentioned before, we are enhancing that particular ability at this point in time.

Let me talk a little bit about some of the main—if I could just limit it to one area where there was a concern, it dealt with the issue of closed meetings. Let me quickly

say that it was never the government's intent to close council meetings. That is simply something that was not contemplated; however, we have made significant improvements to the so-called "closed meeting" provisions. Let me just give you an example of that. Let me, first of all, read to you the section that was contained in the original act, as proposed in Bill 130. It stated, "A meeting may be closed to the public if, at the meeting, no member of the council or local board or committee of either of them, as the case may be, discusses or otherwise deals with any matter in a way that materially advances the business or decision-making of the council, local board or committee."

It was felt that that was simply giving too much latitude, that too many issues could be brought behind closed doors where an argument could be made or where a question could be raised as to whether or not the issue and the decision on that issue was being advanced. So we dramatically changed it to come much closer to the intent of the closed meeting provision. We made the following change:

"A meeting of a council or local board ... may be closed to the public if the following conditions are both satisfied:

"1. The meeting is held for the purpose of educating or training the members.

"2. At the meeting, no member discusses or otherwise deals with any matter in a way that materially advances the business or decision-making of the council...."

So we are strictly limiting the closed meeting provisions to meetings that are held for the purpose of education and training of members. That's particularly relevant at this time of the year when we have so many new councillors elected across this province, and certainly the training and education of those councillors is extremely important. We have limited it to just that particular situation.

We have also said that if that happens, there should be a mechanism set up whereby if a member of the general public disagrees with that, they should be able to go to someone within the municipality to complain about that provision. So we are allowing for an investigator to be appointed. That investigator will have almost ombudsman-like criteria, to the extent that the individual should be independent—I'm just looking for the four criteria of the ombudsman powers that are contained in the new act. Well, it should basically be a person independent from the municipality itself.

We've also given a provision in the act that if council does not appoint such an independent individual, then the Ombudsman for the province of Ontario can in effect make an investigation as to whether or not the closed meeting met all the criteria set out in the act. The Ombudsman was very much involved in setting out the four criteria. They're sort of the pillars of the ombudsman office, which I don't seem to have in front me right here. They dealt with the question of being independent and the question of being—where the heck is that? Here it is: independence, impartiality, confidentiality and a

credible investigation process. Those are the four criteria set out internationally as to what an ombudsman, under any kind of government system, should have. As a matter of fact, our current Ombudsman Act here in the province of Ontario does not even contain the four principles under which ombudsmen operate, but we are making sure that those are the criteria that will have to be followed by whoever's appointed by a municipality to launch these kinds of investigations. As a matter of fact, our Ontario Ombudsman has suggested that these four corner principles are important to the credibility of the position that may be created.

With that, I really believe that one of the main objections to that provision in the bill has been overcome, to the extent that we're limiting it purely to educational and training sessions; secondly, that whoever investigates it, whether it's the investigator appointed by the municipality or the Ombudsman, if the municipality doesn't appoint anybody, the Ombudsman or investigator will have the principles attached to them whereby he or she is independent, impartial, there's confidentiality with respect to the information that's received, and a credible investigation process is set up.

A number of minor amendments were made as well directly at the request of different municipalities. For example, in Waterloo and York regions, the spheres of jurisdiction were extended in the area of transportation to include not only the bus system, but also any transportation system that it doesn't currently have. Waterloo and York requested the change so that they could consider other public transit options, such as light rail, as well. I don't think anybody would disagree with that, particularly in today's transportation world.

1900

The term of office for warden was also extended. Whereas currently a warden can be appointed either for one year or the full term of the council, we said, "Leave it up to the individual county councils as to whether they want to appoint somebody for a year, two years, three years or for the term of the council," which of course is currently four years.

There were a number of other changes made with respect to the board of control in London, for example. Currently, the board of control in London, which is the only municipality that has a board of control, could only be eliminated by a two-thirds majority vote. That was changed whereby it, and any other municipality that may have a board of control in the future, may be able to dissolve the board of control with a simple majority of council, rather than the current requirements of two thirds, and without OMB approval, as is currently the case as well.

One of the other interesting things that was added in the new act was the community improvement areas, in that councils were given new authority for councils to use the financial incentives within the community improvement plans without ministerial approval.

Again, all of these powers that we've given to municipalities are of a permissive nature. It doesn't mean

they have to use them, but we just felt it was absolutely important that if they are regarded as true mature levels of government, it is extremely important that they have the ability to get involved in a lot of these areas from which they have been denied in the past or for which they had to get provincial government approval.

If I could just sum up before turning it over to my parliamentary assistant, the basic underlying theory that we used in coming up with this act was quite simply this: We went back to each and every ministry that has anything to do with municipal government and we said, "Where are you involved in the decision-making process?" They gave us a list of items, then we went back to them and said, "Okay, what is the provincial interest in your particular ministry being involved in making those kinds of decisions?" And if there was no provincial interest, then quite frankly we felt it was best to leave those kinds of decisions to the local municipal councils. Because again, we believe that they play just as important a role in the total governance of the province of Ontario within their areas of jurisdiction as we do at the provincial level.

I would hope that, with the amendments that are contained in the bill, this bill will serve our municipalities for many, many years in the future. I sincerely hope that all the members in this Legislature will support this bill, because it will really lead to better local governance than we currently have in the province of Ontario. With that, I'll turn it over to my parliamentary assistant, the member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I'm delighted to follow the minister here in this debate in speaking to a bill which we've been working on for some time in consultation with our municipalities across this province, Bill 130. It's a bill that really represents amendments to the Municipal Act, which is the bible that governs the relationship between the province and municipalities across Ontario. What we see here in this bill is not just tinkering with the Municipal Act; we see a bill that completely transforms that relationship from a prescriptive approach that has been taken through past history to a permissive approach, an approach that believes in municipalities, that believes that the people in this province can hold their municipal governments to account, that believes in the creativity of municipalities and municipal politicians from one end of this province to the other and believes that because of that more permissive approach, we'll be able to unleash a lot of the creativity that exists out here in dealing with the challenges that many of our municipal governments face.

I am not going to speak for very long this evening, in light of the hour, but I do want to say a few things. I want to thank the opposition critics, Mr. Prue for the NDP and Mr. Hardeman for the Conservative Party, for the good work that they put in throughout the committee hearings and throughout our clause-by-clause. Their input was helpful. I think the committee worked well together and I think we were able to, as a committee, improve the bill overall. I know the job of opposition critics is to criticize,

and I think on this bill they criticized but often in a relatively constructive manner, in a way that allowed us to listen carefully to some of the concerns raised by stakeholders and our critics alike, and to respond to them and improve the bill.

I also want to thank Minister Gerretsen. The minister and I have had the opportunity to work together for the entire term of this government. There are not too many ministers and PAs, I think, who have been stuck together for that long a period of time—and I don't use the word "stuck" in any but a positive way. We really have had the opportunity to work together on a number of pieces of legislation: the greenbelt, the Planning Act, the Ontario Municipal Board reform, the City of Toronto Act and the OMERS legislation, among others. Together we have been able to work on a number of things.

I want to thank him for the approach he's taken on each and every one of those bills, and the approach taken at committee on this bill. It shows very, very visibly that the government was open to suggestions to improve. The minister outlined a number of the very substantial amendments, substantial improvements we've made to this bill that are going to make it better public policy in the long run. I want to thank Mr. Gerretsen for his open-minded approach to this bill and for the other legislation he has brought forward that I think has all been very solid, very good approaches to public policy.

As I said earlier, we believe in the people of Ontario; and we believe in the local councils across this province, that they will in fact use these new powers they're being given, this new autonomy they're being given to make decisions within their realm of decision-making. We believe they'll do that in a way that's going to better serve the public interest. The province will be there, as we should be, to ensure the public interest is served throughout, but we're now giving municipalities the autonomy to discover those creative abilities that municipalities from one end of this province to the other have.

I'm going leave it at that. The minister outlined a lot of the details of the bill. I'll just say that this bill, combined with the dozens of other things we've done in partnership with municipalities, has transformed the relationship between the province and municipalities across Ontario from a confrontational relationship full of conflict to a relationship of co-operation and respect. That's something that I personally am proud of. It's something I think every member of the government should be proud of and it's something I think is going serve the interests of this province for many years to come.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I am pleased to rise today to talk about Bill 130, the Municipal Statute Law Amendment Act. I want to say that there are many things about this bill, particularly the purpose of the bill, that I agree with and that our party agrees with. The intent of the bill, as was pointed out by the minister at the introduction of second reading, was to create more trans-

parency and accountability, and that local government was a mature level of government and needed legislation that would help them do the things they thought needed doing for their communities in a way their communities wanted them done. That I would agree with. But the processes we went through—obviously, we didn't come up with quite that. So there are a number of areas I have problems with that I'd like to address this evening.

I see some serious concerns with this bill, as do my colleagues in the New Democratic Party. Mr. Speaker, I understand you're going to speak to it subsequent to my speech, and I'm sure you'll mention some of those.

What I found interesting about it, as the parliamentary assistant was talking about it, was that after we got through with the public hearings and we started the clause-by-clause, the NDP had proposed eight amendments, our party had introduced approximately 25 amendments, but the government had over 50 amendments, including one that recommended we vote against a whole section of the bill. In fact, there were so many amendments from the government that we had to extend the committee time in clause-by-clause. There were also two amendments—and this is interesting, Mr. Speaker—from an individual government member dealing with the ability of municipalities to license airport taxis and limos. They were submitted by him as an individual, we were told, so I guess he didn't agree with the government. But to be fair, I should point out that one of those amendments was withdrawn and the other one was passed by the government. So obviously, they did agree with something their member had to say, just not the total.

1910

The reason I'm talking about the number of amendments is that it seems interesting that a government would introduce a bill that they acknowledge wasn't really what they wanted and that wasn't ready. In estimates committee on October 10, the Minister of Municipal Affairs said, "What I've said about any bill I've introduced—I've introduced 12 of them, and 10 of them have passed—is that if somebody has a better idea and a particular amendment, we're always open to amendments. It's the same thing with respect to this bill."

Obviously, this was his best shot at it. But there were 50 different instances where somebody had a better idea than the minister, and they have now been introduced.

On the same day, when the member from Beaches-East York questioned the minister on how several changes in the bill increased accountability and transparency, the minister said, "Do the other two issues that you've mentioned—the electronic voting and the closed meetings—take something away from that? Well, we can discuss that, and we should put parameters around that, quite frankly."

Incidentally, neither of those had any parameters put around. I will go into both of those issues in more detail later on.

My concern, as I've mentioned before, is that if you make that many changes to a bill after second reading, the public doesn't get a chance to comment or even see

the final version of the bill, especially when the government rushes it through with only one evening debate shortly before Christmas.

Greg Levine, who was one of the presenters at the public hearing on November 15, had a very important point. He said, "The comment I heard when I first sat down here while you people were debating whether you'd go on today or not—that AMO is the major stakeholder—isn't right." That's what the man said. "The public is the major stakeholder. The public matters, and you have to have credible institutions for this accountability stuff to work"—he's referring to the bill—"and they aren't."

One of the things that's very interesting to me is that it was the municipal affairs and housing parliamentary assistant who said that AMO was the major stakeholder. I hope that isn't the way that all McGuinty Liberals think about it. That explains some of the problems in this bill.

I want to point out that there are some things that I like about the bill. I respect municipalities and I support giving them more tools to do their jobs, but not at the expense of openness and accountability to their constituents.

I also want to point out there are a number of provisions in the bill that are going to cost municipalities to implement. Municipalities can't afford another Liberal download. The cost of delivering municipal service has increased dramatically over the past few years and the amounts of provincial transfers haven't kept pace. Municipalities are asking for help and instead they received a promise of another Liberal study, the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review. That certainly doesn't seem like they're getting the respect that they deserve.

During the estimates committee on October 10, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said, "I can tell you that doing as massive a job as this fiscal and financial review in an 18-month time period is not too long, because we want to make sure we do it right."

It is commendable that he wants to do it right. What he neglects to mention is that for the first 100 days after the review was announced, we heard absolutely nothing. It was 100 days after the review was announced that we finally heard something, not from the government but from AMO. The Minister of Municipal Affairs said in estimates that day, "Once we know who the AMO individuals are going to be, both from staff and from the elected side, I don't see any reason why an announcement couldn't be made as to who they are, and the same thing with the individuals from the province's side."

It's been over 120 days since the review was announced and three weeks since the AMO announcement, and from the government side we have heard absolutely nothing. I know there are a lot of municipalities hoping that Santa is going to bring them results a lot sooner than the 18 months the government promised. So far, I've received almost 150 letters from municipalities and over 135 of those municipalities have passed a resolution

calling on the government to speed up the review. I want to take a minute to read part of the resolution most of them have passed:

"Whereas delays in balancing the cost of delivering services with the ability to pay are resulting in delayed maintenance of infrastructure, reduced municipal services and property tax increases across the province; ...

"Therefore be it resolved that in the opinion of the council of [name of municipality—and there are 135 of them so far] that the provincial government's currently proposed Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review (which will not be completed until February 2008, after the next provincial election) is needlessly drawn out and that a full review to balance the delivery of service with the ability to pay should be completed much more expediently, in order to avoid hitting taxpayers with unsustainable property tax hikes or significant reductions in service."

It seems to me that before you try to delay the results of a study for 18 months, one of the questions that needs to be asked is what impact the delay will have on the taxpayers. I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs that question during the estimates committee. He said that his ministry doesn't even track property taxes or property tax increases.

How can you be sure that taxpayers aren't suffering with huge property tax increases if you aren't tracking them? How can you be sure that you can afford all the new responsibilities you are giving them in Bill 130, such as ensuring that they can afford a municipal ombudsman and give him the resources to do his job properly?

That brings me to some of my concerns about Bill 130. There are a number of concerns about the bill that I want to talk about today, but I want to start with the two biggest concerns: more closed meetings and municipal ombudsmen who aren't as effective and independent as they seem.

One of the most outspoken critics of these two sections of the bill was in fact the provincial Ombudsman. Shortly after Bill 130 was introduced, he said, "While purporting to introduce a degree of accountability into municipal administration, this bill will result in an unfair, inequitable and unsustainable patchwork of quasi-oversight measures throughout Ontario." He said that on June 19. On July 26, the Ombudsman spoke and was quoted in the *Hamilton Spectator* as saying, "It is a piece of legislation that exploits the goodwill associated with the term 'Ombudsman,' yet doesn't deliver on any of the basic tenets. They are making it appear as a very credible, substantial step forward when it borders on fraud."

In fact, the Ombudsman was so concerned about these issues that he asked for additional time to speak to the committee during the public hearings. He needed more than the 15 minutes to express all of his concerns. At that point, we had extra time in the public hearings, so it was a choice of listening to the Ombudsman or going home early. The government members of the committee refused to let him have the extra time. Let's keep in mind

that this is a servant of the Legislature whose job it is to look out for the people of Ontario. Perhaps the government members knew how many amendments were coming and wanted to get started on them early.

The Ombudsman used his presentation to address his concerns about the lack of real independence of the municipal ombudsman. He said, "As it currently stands, the proposed municipal ombudsman model is deficient and offensive to basic principles of oversight." He added, "A fundamental defect is that the ombudsman powers and authority are not set out in legislation. Even though what is required is well known, municipalities are free to establish the powers and duties of their ombudsman. Indeed, the function provisions leave it to municipalities to decide when the ombudsman can conduct investigations. Municipalities can confine the kinds of investigations their ombudsmen can conduct by limiting them to specific complaints or preventing 'own motion' investigations."

The Ombudsman also raised the concern that under this legislation municipalities could appoint a municipal employee to be ombudsman. During the presentation he said, "Contrary to what Bill 130 would allow, under no circumstances should ombudsmen be employees of the organizations they oversee. They should have a fixed term, adequate resourcing and operational independence." That was a quote from November 15. Incidentally, the minister spoke to it, but this was not done.

During his presentation, Gordon Cameron of the Ontario Community Newspaper Association raised a valid point about the conflict of interest created by allowing municipal employees to serve as ombudsmen. He said:

"As you all well know, it's often not enough to do what's right, but you must be seen to be doing what's right.

"This request also serves a practical purpose. For instance, if the municipal ombudsman in their other capacity gave a presentation to council in camera ... that ... was challenged by a member of the public, would it be fair for them to turn around and sit in judgment of that meeting?"

The Information and Privacy Commissioner's office also expressed concern in a written submission to the committee. It said, "We are strongly of the view that any oversight of the open meetings provisions must be at arm's length from, and independent of, the municipal council or board including the staff of the municipality."

We also heard concerns on the proposed municipal ombudsman and auditor general from groups like the Newmarket Taxpayers Association, who said, "The public good is the overriding concern and therefore the independence and impartiality of the auditor are crucial, particularly as there are no opposition parties at the municipal level, as there are at the federal and provincial levels, to help keep the municipal governments of the day honest and accountable. How effective would an auditor general hired by a municipality be where his future career prospects and audit duties are determined by the very people whose decisions he may have to audit?" That was

presented to us by Ray Yorston from the Newmarket Taxpayers Association.

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The government will try to claim that they have fixed this problem by introducing an amendment that mentions independence and impartiality. What they may not be so quick to point out is how weak the section is. It says that the Ombudsman must "have regard to, among other matters, the importance of the matters listed in subsection (2.3)"—"have regard to, among other matters...." The independence of the Ombudsman is one of the key parts of this role, and the McGuinty Liberals have weakened it to the point of being almost meaningless.

If no municipal Ombudsman is appointed, and the minister mentioned this, the provincial Ombudsman has jurisdiction over the municipality and can investigate the concerns of the meetings. The Ombudsman expressed concern that if there was a problem, the municipality would simply appoint someone to the position to stop the investigation. He said, "They can remove the jurisdiction of my office to investigate open-meeting violations by simply appointing their own 'investigators,' and they can define the powers and duties those investigators will have." That's a quote from the Ombudsman. I did propose an amendment to prevent this, and the government members on the committee, of course—Mr. Speaker, you were there—voted it down.

The Ombudsman also expressed serious concerns that Bill 130 allows additional closed or in camera meetings. He said, "There is little room for closed-door politics in a mature democracy.

"We in mature democracies speak about transparency and openness with reverence, because democracy cannot be healthy without transparency and openness.

"The reason is simple. Malicious or self-serving or just plain bad decisions, the bacteria of government, can flourish in the dark but in a democracy cannot survive the sanitizing light of public scrutiny." That was a direct quote from the Ombudsman.

We recently had a municipal election. I want to tell the minister that I talked to a lot of municipal politicians, and I've been reading the newspapers, and I can't find a single person anywhere who lost the election because their municipal council was too open. I can't find a single person who complained that their municipality was too transparent and needed more closed meetings—not a single one. I'm really starting to wonder whom the minister has been talking to. The municipal politicians I've spoken to want to serve their constituents in the best way possible. They aren't afraid of open, public debate.

The minister talks about respecting municipal governments, but allowing additional closed meetings doesn't show respect. It shows that the McGuinty Liberals think that our municipal politicians aren't good enough or smart enough to be able to express their opinions in public. Our party has more respect for municipal politicians than that.

As I mentioned earlier, the Ombudsman didn't get to make the rest of his presentation, but he wrote it and sent

it to the Chair of the committee and each of the three parties because he felt that the concerns were that serious. The Ombudsman asked that it be read into the oral record. The government members once again said no.

Finally, at the beginning of clause-by-clause, I had a chance to read it into the record to ensure that all members of the committee heard his views before we debated the amendments. I'm not going to read the entire presentation now because it is available in Hansard, but there are a few quotes that I want to mention.

The first quote is: "In truth, the oversight regime that has been designed is decaffeinated; it is too weak to keep any councils or boards awake to the importance of open meetings." He also said of Bill 130, "It is badly flawed. It's a shame that it is in fact enabling legislation—it enables closed government while appearing without critical examination to champion openness."

The Information and Privacy Commissioner's office also expressed concerns in a submission to the committee: "Our concern with this provision is that it undermines the basic principle that all meetings should be open to the public unless there is compelling need to keep information confidential." Once again, this is a servant of the Legislature, there to protect the interests of the people of Ontario, expressing serious concern about the fact that Bill 130 allows additional closed meetings.

The government will tell us that they now have fixed this problem because they brought in an amendment that makes additional closed meetings for training or education, so they've kind of narrowed the scope of the closed meetings. In the presentation to the committee, Gordon Cameron, from the Ontario Community Newspapers Association, specifically discussed education and training. He asked the government to ensure the media are allowed to access those sessions. He said, "Having access to experts in the more technical fields has enabled me to write more complete stories than I otherwise would have been able. Basic questions sometimes asked by members of council assist greatly in that pursuit."

He went on to say, "If the only reason to deny the public the right to attend them is to prevent possible embarrassment to an elected official, than we don't feel that is a good enough reason."

I agree. When so many voters and taxpayers get information about the changes that will affect them through the media, how can you justify barring the media from anything that might help them do their jobs? The decisions that politicians make affect people's lives. No politicians should be embarrassed to ask a dumb question. They must ensure that they fully understand the changes they are making and the impact on people's lives. People also need the ability to fully understand how those changes affect them. Sometimes they need the answer to the dumb question just as much as the politician asking it. And sometimes they rely on the politicians to ask the dumb question and get the full explanation because the citizen may not get a chance to ask that question.

I expect, Mr. Speaker, having served on a number of committee hearings with me, I would rank right up there in the higher echelon of asking dumb questions, but that has never bothered me or stopped me from doing that. There have been a number of times over the last couple of years when I thought, as I'm sure many of my colleagues have, that they couldn't possibly be doing what I think they're doing because, now, that would be dumb. So you ask what seems to be a dumb question only to find out that they really are doing it.

Let me give you an example in Bill 130. In this act it outlines the duties and responsibility of the mayor as CAO of the municipality. One of the duties it says that he shall do—not "may," but "shall"—is to promote the municipality locally, nationally and internationally. Reading this, I thought the bill was actually requiring the head of every municipality, large and small, to promote their municipality internationally. So I asked some of the staff at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs if that was correct. And the answer? You guessed it: The answer was yes. It seemed like a dumb question, but it turned out it was really just a dumb answer. I introduced an amendment to change this to "may" instead of "shall" so every mayor didn't have to take a trip to Paris at the taxpayers' expense, but the government members on the committee again refused to change the word.

I have a number of other areas of concern in this bill, and there are a number of problems in the area that are significant enough that people took time to come to the committee and express their concerns. I want to take a few minutes to tell you about some of them and how they were addressed.

Oxford county and the city of Woodstock are both in the great riding of Oxford, and both made presentations requesting that the government clarify some of the waste definitions. Specifically, they asked the government to define what constitutes waste collection, waste management and recycling collection. These are two local governments coming forward and saying the current situation is confusing and if it isn't fixed, it may lead to disputes in the future. Now, remember, the issues of collection and disposal—the jurisdiction for those belong to two different levels of government. If recycling is not defined, who is responsible for the process of recycling? They wanted that clarified with definition. I introduced these definitions and of course the answer was no.

This is another area. Under Bill 130, municipalities are allowed to form corporations. A number of organizations raised concerns that municipal corporations may result in unfair competition with the private sector. We have a lot of faith in our municipal politicians, but we thought that it would be wise to have safeguards in place. The auditor's report last week showed what can happen sometimes when people are allowed to run wild. Rob Cook of the Ontario Waste Management Association, during his presentation on November 22, said, "It's the structure of how municipalities can provide support to these entities that isn't on the same sort of level that the private sector deals with."

These organizations were just asking that the government ensure that there was a level playing field for all taxpayers so taxpayer dollars weren't used to subsidize municipal corporations. We proposed two amendments to ensure that taxpayers and voters would have some protection.

The first amendment required that municipal corporations would have to report to their shareholders with annual financial statements open to the public. This would ensure that taxpayers know how many of their hard-earned tax dollars are going into funding the corporation, or subsidizing it. The government members on the committee—you guessed it—voted it down.

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The second amendment was to give the municipal auditor general the authority to investigate the municipal corporation if there were complaints about the way they were conducting business. Again, the government members voted it down.

When Doug Reycraft, the president of AMO, appeared before the committee, I asked him whether he thought municipal corporations would compete with the private sector corporations. He said he didn't think they would. He also said, "But if there's a need to clarify something like that to prevent municipalities from doing that sort of thing, then I think we'd have no objection to such an amendment." The president of AMO—who was, according to the parliamentary assistant, the major stakeholder—had no problem with our amendments to put some guidelines in place for those corporations, but the government, of course, didn't see fit to do that.

Another concern that these industries expressed was the potential that private corporations, which already require a provincial licence, may now require another municipal licence. That was presented by a number of presenters. For instance, the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Urban Development Institute pointed out that they're already required to be licensed by the Tarion Warranty Corp. In their presentation to the committee, the Greater Toronto Home Builders said, "It is the position of the residential building industry across the province that Tarion, not municipalities, is in the best position to protect consumers and builders and set standards which home builders and developers must abide by. Further, duplication of licensing of home builders by municipalities is an unwarranted tax grab." This additional level of paperwork and red tape would cost business money, resulting in increased housing costs and lost jobs. Again, no changes were made in that section of the bill. In fact, it is still possible for municipalities to license and to charge fees for the same purpose that someone else is already doing it. Such is the case with the home builders.

Now, another area is buried deep within schedule D of Bill 130. It's a little change that very few people have noticed but that can affect thousands of landowners across the province. The change is written in the act as changes in the Line Fences Act, and it has to do with railroads. Presently, if former railroad rights-of-way are

conveyed to municipalities for recreational circumstances, then the municipalities are solely responsible for fencing, as the previous owner of the right-of-way was. Bill 130 says the Line Fences Act would apply. There was some confusion during the committee on what the Bill 130 changes would do, so I want to quote from the memo that our very capable legislative research people created, as I asked the question of the legislative research. I asked if they could tell me what that really means, because the presenters had a different view from what I thought it was.

The note we got back said, "Under the proposed amendment, municipal fencing requirements would be limited to cases where a 'farming business' was being carried out on the land adjoining the former railroad right-of-way."

People who bought their properties along railroads or railroad rights-of-way bought them with the expectation that the fence along the line of their property would be maintained by the right-of-way. That was the agreement that was put in place as the property was split for the use of the railroad. Now, with this little change, landowners will be responsible for part or all the cost of that fence. It seems to me it would be more likely that a hiker might wander off the right-of-way than a train. I want to point out that I'm happy that farmers are being protected and would only have to pay half the cost, but what about the rest of the ratepayers?

Before this change was made, Dr. Caldwell did a review on behalf of the government of the Line Fences Act and consulted with a number of groups, but what is amazing is that in the consultation on this change, there were just three people consulted who didn't represent organizations. That seems like a major flaw in the consultation. I don't know how the consultation was done, whether they advertised to the public, but I know they didn't ask my opinion, and I don't know of an individual who lived along a right-of-way who was asked.

I also introduced an amendment that would ensure that someone whose property is bisected by a right-of-way would have the ability to cross that right-of-way. During his presentation to the committee on November 27, Paul Mistele, vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, said, "We also recommend that the Line Fences Act be amended to protect the right of property owners whose land is bisected by former railroad rights-of-way to continue to be able to cross that right-of-way, whenever necessary, and without prior notice, for as long as their property is landlocked by virtue of the right-of-way cutting their land in two."

When asked about what the current situation is for those landowners, his colleague Peter Jeffery, senior policy researcher from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture said—and again this is a quote, "Some of the trail organizations that are running the trails are quite responsible in allowing the farmers to continue to cross the trail as needed. Others are taking the position that they have no obligation to allow crossing," and yet the government

members of the committee voted against an amendment that would have given the landowners the right to freely access both halves of their property by crossing the right-of-way.

Bill 130 also includes a large number of amendments to the City of Toronto Act. In fact, there were 68 pages of amendments to the act or amendments consequential to the enactment of the act. This, Mr. Speaker, you will be aware, is pretty amazing considering the City of Toronto Act hasn't come into force yet. When I questioned why there were so many amendments, I was told that it was to make the same changes to the City of Toronto Act that we were making to the Municipal Act; in other words, to eliminate differences. Now, to many, this may come under the category of a dumb question, but if the government wants the act to be the same, why did they go to all the trouble of exempting the city of Toronto from the Municipal Act? Why did they not apply this act to all municipalities in the province, including Toronto? Why not just leave Toronto in the Municipal Act and then create a City of Toronto Act to give them the additional powers that are in the City of Toronto Act, such as the taxing powers that they didn't want other municipalities to have?

During clause-by-clause, we introduced an amendment dealing with the extra taxing powers which would have removed the additional taxing powers from the City of Toronto Act. Since so many changes were made, I thought the most important one that needed to be made was that we should remove that, and I want explain why we did that.

First, because the City of Toronto Act was brought to you by the McGuinty Liberals, the ones who looked Ontarians in the eye and promised they wouldn't raise taxes. Well, whether it's introducing the health tax or the new taxes in the City of Toronto Act, it's still raising taxes. It's still what the McGuinty Liberals promised the people of Ontario they wouldn't do.

Secondly, I introduced the amendment because I have a real fear that come the municipal budget, instead of helping Toronto, the McGuinty Liberals are going to tell them to raise their own with their new taxing powers. We already know that the Liberals are dragging their feet on the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery review. Why would we expect them to behave any differently here?

Thirdly, I introduced the amendment because it is an issue of fairness. Why should people pay more to own a car or have a drink just because they live in Toronto? Should a restaurant in Toronto earn less on a drink because they have to include more tax than the restaurant across the road in Mississauga?

The Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association pointed out during their presentation that the profit margin in most restaurants is extremely low. They are concerned that any new tax will likely have to come from the funds that could otherwise be used to create jobs, increase wages or invest in future businesses.

The government talks about how this bill respects municipalities and recognizes them as a mature level of government. Once again, the Liberals are saying one thing and doing another. The bill fails to give taxpayer protection, but the McGuinty Liberals have included a section that provides themselves protection. Section 451 allows municipal bylaws to be suspended by regulation when it is considered necessary or desirable in the provincial interest—no taxpayers' interest, no constituent interest, just the provincial interest. So our locally elected government can consult with the people and enact a bylaw that reflects what the people wanted, but if it isn't what the provincial government wants, the province can just suspend it. How is that respecting municipalities?

Mayor Fennell from the city of Brampton said, "Bill 130 contradicts itself with its own inconsistencies. The bill is intended to provide more autonomy, yet it introduces clauses that take away that opportunity."

I want to thank everyone who came forward to share their concerns on this bill, and I appreciate all the phone calls, the presentations and submissions. We respect municipalities. We know how hard municipal politicians work. But one thing we have been hearing over and over from stakeholders and members of the public is that they want to ensure that there is protection for them and their tax dollars.

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Give municipalities the ability to form corporations but give taxpayers the right to see the books and make sure the corporations are in their best interests. Give municipalities more responsibility but make sure that there is a truly independent and effective ombudsman and auditor general to investigate and oversee municipal operations. Give municipalities tools to be able to function effectively but ensure that citizens and taxpayers have the ability to question how they are functioning and what they are doing.

During her presentation to the committee, Sheila Jacobson, a citizen from Brampton, said: "We've tried to turn to Queen's Park. I've called the Premier's office, I've called Minister Gerretsen's office, and we're told that the cities are on their own, the regions are on their own. You cannot throw away the key. You cannot leave people to their own devices." Sheila made a presentation to the committee on November 20.

The people of Ontario have made it clear that they don't want the McGuinty Liberals to give children's aid societies a blank cheque, they don't want the board of Hydro One to have a blank cheque, and they don't want municipalities to have one either.

The minister tries to claim that this act creates transparency and accountability, but sadly, that is exactly what it fails to do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me a few minutes to make my presentation.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: Let me just make one comment with respect to the open-meeting provision. Currently, there are about six or seven exceptions to the open-

meeting concept, and they deal with issues such as personnel matters, security of property of the municipality, labour relations, impending acquisitions etc. What we've simply done is added one additional provision, and that is for the training and education of councillors. That's all we've done.

From listening to the critic for the opposition, you would think that he was against any of these provisions at all, yet it's interesting to note that he moved an amendment that would add three further categories in which closed meetings could be allowed. It was his amendment that said that if a matter had "an adverse effect on the finances of a municipality or local board," if it tended "to prejudice the reputation and character of any person, unless the person requests an open meeting" or resulted "in the disclosure of records, if the disclosure of the records is prohibited under this act"—the sole point that I'm trying to make is that he wanted to allow for even greater closed-meeting provisions than we have in this act.

If I might just finish off by saying that we truly believe that the time has come when the vast majority of municipalities are mature orders of government, and they should be allowed to make their own decisions. From everything I've heard from the member here today, he obviously wants municipalities to remain creatures of the province and wants to prescribe, in as detailed form as possible, what municipalities can or cannot do. We believe that they are just as accountable. They are subject to elections every four years in exactly the same way that we are, and, as he will openly admit, they're even closer to the people than perhaps the politicians at the provincial or federal level.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

The member from Oxford has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Hardeman: I want to thank the minister for getting up and at least letting me know that he was listening to my presentation. I very much appreciate that.

In relation to the comments that he made, I want to point out that those three instances that I put forward in an amendment were in fact just clearer definitions of things that are presently allowed in the Municipal Act and that just read out as clearer definitions of what falls under "legal" and "personnel" within a municipality.

The second thing I wanted to point out is, as Mr. Cameron from the Ontario Community Newspaper Association made quite clear in his presentation, if there's one area where the press needs to be and there's absolutely no reason to keep the press out, it's where you have someone making a technical briefing to council on the issues so the press can understand it as well as the people who are going to make decisions on it. Secondly, when you have a training session, what could possibly be confidential about a training session in a municipality? So those are two areas that have been included in the closed meeting section of it. In my opinion, the opinion of my caucus, the opinion of the newspaper association and the opinion of the Ombudsman of Ontario, there is

absolutely no justification for increasing the closing of the meetings for training and technical briefings. I just wanted to clarify that for the record.

I thank the minister very much for listening to my presentation.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I ask for unanimous consent to stand down the lead of our critic, just for one round.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Ms. Horwath: Thank you for recognizing me in the opportunity to debate Bill 130. I've had a chance to speak on this bill once before and was expecting some changes to address some of the issues that I had during the second reading clause-by-clause debate, at which time amendments come forward. I was concerned that it doesn't look like they—at least the ones that I was interested in—had much change to them. I'm only going to put a couple of them on the record, because I know that you, in fact, Mr. Speaker, my lead critic in this area, have yet to speak to this bill in third reading debate.

There are a couple of things I thought were important from my perspective. The first is the issue of ombudsman opportunities. The bill actually allows municipalities to appoint an ombudsman-like figure for the municipalities. Again, it allows for that—it doesn't require it, but it enables a municipality that may wish to do so to actually appoint an ombudsman-like figure.

Interestingly enough, some of the editorializing in my own community initially took this as a very positive thing. However, I wanted to quote from a letter that was sent out by the Ombudsman of Ontario's office. He says, "While purporting to introduce a degree of accountability into municipal administration, this bill will result in an unfair, inequitable and unsustainable patchwork of quasi-oversight measures throughout Ontario." Why is it a patchwork? It's a patchwork because some municipalities will undertake the opportunity to appoint an ombudsman-like figure and others won't. Therefore, there will be no consistency across the province and there will be no consistent level by which residents of municipalities from one end of the province to the other can obtain accountability from this particular position, because in some cases there will be one and in other cases there won't; hence the patchwork comments from the Ombudsman.

But that's not the only problem with this proposal. As it was initially in the bill and as it continues to be in the bill in the same way, the actual arm's-length nature or completely unbiased separate nature that an ombudsman needs to have to be an effective oversight body simply will not be in place if, in fact, that person is hired by and becomes a staff member of the municipality that decides to take on that position. It's just passing strange, the idea that this creates some kind of extra level of accountability. I just can't see how that's the case.

I come from working on a municipal council for a number of years. At any time when there were discussions or disputes about whether something was

being done appropriately or not, particularly in closed-door meetings, which I'll come to next, we would often-times turn to the clerk. Of course, the clerk was also an employee of the municipality, so that clerk was often put in an awkward position when having to make judgments as to whether there was an appropriate question being raised about a procedural issue.

Similarly, if the ombudsman is appointed by the municipality and is the employee of the municipality and has offices within the structure of the municipality, then obviously their ability to be unbiased is quite compromised. In fact, Mr. Marin, our Ombudsman of Ontario, warned that "All of these municipal offices would lack the independence and strong investigative authority that is characteristic of an ombudsman. They would essentially be an internal complaint departments run by municipalities and dressed up as ombudsmen."

Although I understand the sentiment and thought that perhaps it could have some positive possibilities, in fact, when you look deeply at the position the government is taking on ombudsmen, it's very clear that that's not something that is going to be very effective in terms of an accountability measure in the bill.

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The next issue I wanted to talk about very briefly is the idea of closed-door meetings. I know the Conservative critic Mr. Hardeman has raised that issue as well, and I will be doing so myself, even though the minister seems to think they've addressed that issue adequately. I don't believe it has been addressed adequately, and I wanted to read from an editorial letter—or I guess it's better described as an opinion column—from a columnist in the *Hamilton Spectator*. Here's what he had to say about this, and I raise it because sometimes people put things in a way that is very humorous, and oftentimes I find that Andrew Dreschel from the *Hamilton Spectator*, in particular, can put things in a very wry way.

This was published June 19, 2006, and here's what he says about the open meetings: "But there's at least one major head scratcher in the proposals." These are the proposals when the bill was first introduced.

"In the portion of the legislation dealing with open meetings, it says a meeting may be closed to the public if no member of council discusses or otherwise deals with a matter that in any way materially advances the business or decision-making of the council.

"Given the tendency among councillors to noodle around issues without coming to concrete conclusions, that sounds like a green light to retreat behind closed doors more, not less, frequently.

"Lord knows, councillors often talk about issues without materially advancing the business of the city.

"Under current legislation, a meeting may only be closed to the public if discussions involve the following issues"—and we've already put on the record what those are, including things like personnel issues, real estate transactions, labour relations, litigation etc. But the bottom line is that he's a bit suspicious as to whether or not councillors need to go behind closed doors.

I come from a community where there has been significant criticism of the council already undertaking to have behind-closed-doors meetings, and people have become in my community extremely suspicious of what goes on in those behind-closed-doors meetings. So frankly, anything that expands the capacity of a council to go into closed-door meetings is disturbing and I know will meet with some cynicism from the residents of the city of Hamilton.

Interestingly enough and kind of coupled with that, there are clauses in the bill that discuss the flexibility of a council to determine for itself appropriate notices to be given for various kinds of meetings. One of the criticisms that's come up in debate of this bill in the past is the fact that there are some concerns that, particularly for communities that are considered to be pro-development communities, the manipulation of or the use of meeting notices to affect the ability of people to participate or not becomes problematic.

I come from a municipality, again, where there has been some controversy over the past couple of years, particularly the last decade or so, around the extent to which public meetings or emergency meetings having taken place, whereby no public notice has been forthcoming, or to the extent to which the entire agenda or the proposed topic of a suggested emergency or a sudden meeting taking place has not been made public.

So you'll know that some of the issues that I raise around closed-door meetings, around the lack of transparency, a sense that things are being done in an inappropriate way, or at least not totally on the up and up, in fact led to a significant shake-up at my local council in these last municipal elections. You'll know that our mayor, who had only been there for one term of office, was not re-elected. I'm not saying specifically that that's his responsibility alone, but I do have to say that there are many people who had a sense that things were not being done in an open, transparent and on the up and up kind of way, and that negatively affected our former mayor's ability to get re-elected in the city of Hamilton.

There was one last thing that I wanted to raise, and then I'll make a final comment, and that is the issue of the siting of energy-producing or power-generating facilities. You may know that in the city of Hamilton, there is one particular energy facility that has been attempting to get a certificate of approval and an operating licence, more or less, from the municipality and from the province. It's called Liberty Energy, and its function is basically to take sewage sludge from hundreds of kilometres around and burn it, or gasify it, which I guess is the better word. It's what they're calling it: a gasification process. They're going to be incinerating sewage sludge at this facility. However, interestingly enough, they are not considering themselves a waste disposal facility or a waste facility, which is what you would think they would be classified as since one of the major kinds of waste, sewage, is what they're going to be actually processing in that plant. But in fact, very interestingly, they have decided that they are more important, and their more

primary activity is the generation of power. Well, that's a bit too cute by half. They're going to generate 10 megawatts of electricity for the grid, and they're calling themselves a power generation facility as opposed to what they really are, a sewage incineration facility, which is a waste management facility. But in order to get around the more stringent siting requirements and certificates of approval for a waste management facility—because the government of Ontario, the Liberal McGuinty government, is saying that if you're generating power, you get a "get out of jail free" card and you don't have to deal with the same kinds of stringent rules around the siting of these kinds of facilities. That raises significant concerns for myself as a person that represents an area that's got heavy industrial zoning in large parts of it, and it really concerns the residents of our community who actually have homes and neighbourhoods right up against that heavy industrial zoning. So it's quite a concern.

Last but not least, I wanted to put on the record a concern that I heard from my local BIAs. I spoke to a woman named Kathy Drewitt, who's the executive director of the downtown Hamilton BIA. She was speaking from HABIA's perspective, which is an association of local Hamilton-area BIAs. She had a little bit of a concern—maybe not a little bit of a concern but a significant concern—that because the bill is very free in terms of the way it allows municipalities to determine what issues, bylaws, regulations and situations BIAs can deal with, it will weaken the provincial collectivity that currently takes place with BIAs. So HABIA in Hamilton—I know my friend and colleague from Parkdale-High Park, Cheri DiNovo, talks about TABIA from Toronto. So there are associations of BIAs within cities and then there are ones that meet from a province-wide perspective. Again, the concern is that by not being very clear in the bill, by not being very clear about what BIAs look like, what they act like, what they're able to do and what they're not able to do, it opens it up so that BIAs will have less and less in common and will become less and less of an effective voice province-wide.

That was the last thing I wanted to get on the record about this issue. I'm concerned that the government really hasn't dealt effectively with some of these concerns that have been raised by myself and others in this debate. Having said that, I think I've adequately raised those issues and I want to thank you for having had the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): The Chair thanks the member from Hamilton East and now calls for further debate. Questions and comments? Seeing none, we'll now proceed to further debate.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I am delighted to join in this debate. First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and in turn the member from Hamilton East, who I understand may be taking the chair in a few minutes, for giving me this opportunity to leave the chair tonight and to participate in the debate. I'd also like thank the chief government whip as well for making

this arrangement. It is often very difficult in a small party like ours to balance the many things that need to be done, to balance participating in the debate with sitting in the chair and going to the many committees and things that happen around this building. So I want to thank everyone for participating and for allowing me to do this.

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This is one of many bills that have transpired over the course of the last year or two related to municipal government. Each one of them adds upon what has already been done. In some ways, I'm very happy to see some movement around municipal structures, laws relating to municipalities, because it was, after all, what drew me into this Legislature in the first place. It was what drew me in and made me want to come to Queen's Park, as opposed to the safe sinecure—at least what I thought was the safe sinecure—of Toronto city hall. It was to effect changes and to finally, once and for all, give municipalities their rightful place in the political life of Canadians.

As one of the earlier speakers—I believe it was the minister—had to say, the Constitution of this country recognizes only two levels of government: the federal government and the provincial governments. It does not set out anything for the municipal governments. As I was too painfully made aware during the great megacity debate and the court challenge, municipalities are creatures of the province.

Having said that, this bill was to build on a number of government initiatives over the last while: the City of Toronto Act, changes to the Municipal Act, Bill 151—there's a whole slew of provisions contained in all of those acts. I must say I do find it a little strange, Madam Speaker—the Speaker has changed now, anybody watching on TV.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): No one. Trust me.

Mr. Prue: I'm being goaded here a little.

The—you've thrown me off. I'm going to start somewhere else.

This bill sets out five goals, of which I think two were cured in committee—and I'd like to deal with that—and three were not.

Now I remember what I was going to say. I was going to say that this government often goes on to talk about treating municipalities as a mature level of government, but I am daily reminded that that is in fact not the case. Although in this Legislature we passed and all New Democrats who were present passed the bill on the City of Toronto Act, which was to give the city of Toronto those extraordinary powers that they had never had before, it only took some six weeks for this government to recognize, I suppose, in their eyes, the errors of their ways and to recant some of those powers. They did so in a way that boldly and very badly affected my community and my neighbourhoods in Beaches-East York and in the neighbouring riding of Toronto-Danforth. That was to take away the municipality's right to hold public hearings and to have the public come forward at the public hearings to challenge energy projects.

There is a development called the Portlands in the southern edges of Beaches—East York and Toronto—Danforth which is very controversial. The mayor was opposed; at the time, the councillors were opposed; the czar of the waterfront was opposed; the citizens were opposed. And this government simply took away the rights of the city of Toronto to challenge this in any way whatsoever. It is just an example of this government saying that municipalities are mature levels of government and then acting in ways to show that in fact the province is in charge and that they are not as mature as this government likes to pretend they are.

Having said that, there were five aspects to this bill which were troubling to me going into committee. The first one was the whole issue of electronic voting. The second one was the whole issue of closed meetings and what constituted a closed meeting. The third one was the government continuing to give itself the power to limit a municipality's power by overriding whatever bylaws the municipality might want to enforce for a period of up to 18 months. The fourth one was the issue of airport taxis, which resurrected quite magically a few days before the committee was actually structured and caused a huge debate within committee. The fifth and last one was that of the ombudsman and the role that the ombudsman will or will not play under the new Municipal Act.

To deal with each of them in turn, the first one of electronic voting: This was resolved in one of the more bizarre fashions I have ever had the opportunity to witness in committee. There was a huge debate taking place around whether or not to allow electronic voting. The government record clearly indicated in the original bill that that was to be part of their agenda. Questions were asked of many people. The citizens almost universally were opposed to electronic voting, and I am not surprised that some of the politicians who came forward were totally in favour of electronic voting. People watching this and some of the members may wonder what constituted electronic voting. It was a very strange request, a very strange portion of the bill put in by the government that would allow people who were not present at a meeting to vote. It didn't matter where you were in the world. The example was given by the government that if you were in a snowstorm and couldn't make the meeting, you could still vote. But the opposite was true: If there was no snow around at all and you were on a beach in Acapulco with a drink in one hand and a cellphone in the other, you could vote too.

I considered this bizarre. This would be the only level of government in Ontario, and probably the only level of government and the only jurisdiction of government in the entire country, that would allow people sitting on a beach in Acapulco with a drink in one hand and a cellphone in the other to participate in a meeting. Questions were asked: "Well, if this is such a good idea for the municipalities, why don't you do it here in the Legislature?" You have to be in the Legislature. They lock that door. If that bell rings and you're not fast enough, that door is locked and you cannot get in,

whether you're a member or not, whether you have a cellphone or not. You have to be in your seat. You can't be elsewhere in the room; you actually have to be in your seat to vote. You have to stand one at a time, you have to be recorded and it has to be announced.

The same is virtually identical in the House of Commons in Ottawa, and with good reason. Only members are allowed to vote. You have to see that that is the member and not someone else. You have to see that they are present. You have to know that they participated in the debate, that they were there, that they heard the arguments. We hold that very dear in this country. It is a form of the tradition of our parliamentary system going back not generations but literally centuries, to Britain, and literally centuries to the Magna Carta, that members who are present can vote. Those who are not present cannot.

But this government was bound and determined to go along with electronic voting for municipalities. The only thing they had to have in a municipality was a quorum. Provided there was a quorum present, everyone could vote, no matter where they were, and just simply call it in. You can understand my consternation at all of this. You can understand how upset I was. We put in a motion to delete this particular section. You can imagine my surprise—I know there was genuine confusion in the government ranks when the government members all voted in total agreement with my motion, forcing me to vote no so that I didn't twig to them that they had made a mistake. It was—

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: You don't even like it when we agree with you.

Mr. Prue: No, because in the end, the mistake was discovered after less than 15 seconds. They had realized they had voted the contrary way, and a request was made to reopen the debate, but never the fool I, I wouldn't allow that to happen. I think this was—

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: So you win.

Mr. Prue: No, I think this was a good thing for your bill. I told them at the time that this was one of five aspects which I had come to oppose the bill on, and it was suddenly gone.

Now we were down to four. The second one, which happened on the same day, involved the taxi industry. I was really quite surprised, because it was not contained within the original bill, but it was two motions that were put forward by a government member related to the airport taxis. I don't have to tell you the great deal of upset that has been caused within the taxi industry of Toronto because of the rules, regulations and policies adopted at Pearson airport. It is literally almost impossible for a taxi driver in Toronto—they can take someone to the airport, but, having driven all the way out there, they cannot drive anybody back out, save and except if they are willing to go into a line, if there's a pre-arranged drive made available, and if they can get into that line, pay \$10, wait, and hopefully the person will be there to be picked up. If they don't do that and they pick someone up there, it's called scooping.

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But the reverse is also true with the airport limousine drivers, or at least we have been led to believe it's true. The limousine drivers are coming downtown to drop someone off. Especially when they drop them off at the hotels, they pay what is called a cookie. The cookie is \$10 or \$20 or \$30 to a doorman at one of the major hotels and that doorman in turn directs business back to the limousines. It's usually a very lucrative business. It's tourists in Toronto from Europe or Asia who want to go to Niagara Falls for the day. A Toronto cabbie would die to get a fare like that. It would pay the groceries for a week—it would pay the groceries maybe for a month. Those invariably end up in the hands of the limousine drivers, according to the Toronto tax industry.

What was contained within the body of the bill was a provision that would not allow the city of Toronto to do something about the scooping in Toronto. I am very mindful of what was contained in there. We had taxi drivers come to make deputations, we had airport limousine drivers come to make deputations, but in the end, I think sanity prevailed on behalf of the government and that particular provision was withdrawn.

So there we go. There were two things that were bad in the bill and both of them were resolved—one, I think, by an error in voting, the second one by having been withdrawn.

There were three things left. I don't think they were resolved and they still trouble me somewhat, although I must say—and I know the minister is listening intently—that I find the overwhelming majority of the bill to be a good bill. I do find that in large part it's going to assist municipalities. I do find in large part that it's going to make them better forms of government, it's going to make them more accountable. But there are three provisions in the bill which I think take away from some of that. I'm only suggesting—I know it's in third reading and I know with the government majority it's likely to pass, but there are three things remaining which still cause some grief to me.

The first one relates to section 101, which is the provision of closed meetings. There is a new proviso. In the past, there were only three things that could close a municipal meeting: if you were talking about a personnel matter, a legal matter, or the sale or disposal of property. Those were the three reasons, and if there was anything else—I know this as a former mayor and the minister, as a former mayor, knows it too. Those were the only three grounds on which a council could go into in camera sessions. But what has been added here are two other provisions—or one provision and a very strange statement.

The other provision is, you can now go in camera for education or training. So if a municipality wants to give education or training to its elected officials, they can invoke section 101. They can go in camera and nothing that is done within that education or training meeting will be seen by the general public. The public cannot comment on how their elected officials are being educated or

trained, the discussions that take place or ensue. I believe this is going to cause some degree of difficulty.

There is another statement that says this can only happen if it does not materially advance the topic. I'm not sure what that means. I'm not sure if the council goes in closed session saying they're being educated or trained, has a whole big discussion, passes no resolutions, but walks out and it's all orchestrated. I did witness some of this in the new megacity of Toronto on one occasion, although we blew the whistle on it pretty fast. "You go out and make the following motion, you go out and make that motion, and then we'll support it and there'll be no debate and it'll be over one, two, three." That was the suggestion made by one of the councillors. He's no longer in the city of Toronto and I won't name him. But that was made and this is what worries me here. The same thing may happen again in a closed session, where the public is not there. The deal may be struck: "You go out, you move the motion; you go out, you speak in favour of it. No one else will speak and we'll have a vote and it'll be over in five minutes." Many of these issues that are dealt with in camera can be quite contentious.

We proposed—and I proposed, but it was defeated in committee—a bit of a saving grace for this. We proposed an amendment that would force the municipality to advertise that they were going to have a closed meeting if they knew in advance—and we understand that you can't always know in advance, but when you know that it is going to be closed—you must advertise the closed meeting in advance so that the public understands that the meeting will not be open to them. We also suggested that at that same time they have to give a substantive reason why the meeting would be closed, i.e., a personnel matter, a legal matter, the sale of land or, in this case, an education or training seminar.

The third thing we suggested as well was the general nature of the matter that would be discussed: if you were discussing a property, the nature of the property, where the property was; if it was a personnel issue, the type of issue that may be involved, without naming the individual; and if it was a legal matter, the court case or whatever that the municipality was involved in, so that citizens would know and would be able to decide up front whether or not it was closed properly. This was defeated. For the life of me, I don't know why it would be defeated, because municipalities should be right up front, and if they know in advance that they're going into closed session, they should not be afraid to say it.

That was not done, so I remain a little upset about section 101 and the provision for closed meetings. In my view, there is no rational or good reason to close them, especially for education or training matters. It just makes no sense. As one of the members said earlier today, to ask the dumb question is no real problem. Asking dumb questions sometimes gets you pretty good answers, and I don't know why any member, particularly a new member, would be afraid to ask the questions that his or her electors had sent them to ask.

There was a second provision that remains outstanding that is very troubling to me, and that is that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may limit the municipality's powers, that at any time the minister and the Lieutenant Governor in Council, i.e., cabinet, can and will limit a municipality's powers by controlling a bylaw for up to 18 months. Literally by the stroke of a pen, what the municipality is attempting to do can be wiped out and the minister can rule by caveat from Queen's Park.

We find this difficult and I find it very difficult. I don't know how often it will be used. I was assured by the parliamentary assistant that it may hardly be used at all, but it's still there. It forces municipalities to wonder just how much authority this government intends to give them, on one hand saying, "You're a mature level," and on the other hand maintaining this provision that at the stroke of a pen the minister may take away any bill or any bylaw that was proposed and passed by a municipality. This is indeed, and continues to be, troubling.

Last but not least was the whole issue of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman came before the committee. As the member from Oxford correctly stated, the Ombudsman came before the committee and said that he wished to make more than a 15-minute presentation. There was agreement with the Conservative members who were there. There was agreement with me that the Ombudsman should be given an extra time slot because we did in fact have an extra time slot available that day. It was denied. The only reason I would have given him an extra time slot, not so much because there was an availability, that no one else was being displaced, is that the Ombudsman is a unique individual in the province of Ontario. There is only one. He is a servant of this Legislature. He acts for and on behalf of the 103 members who are assembled here. The Ombudsman has a unique perspective, and in no other place in this province is an individual constituted in such a way that he or she would have those kinds of powers.

This bill sets out that municipalities can have an ombudsman-like person in their employ. What the Ombudsman wanted to tell us in some considerable detail was that if a municipality wants to hire an ombudsman, if a municipality wants to have them do the right things, there have to be many, many safeguards. And it's just not enough to simply place the resolution within the body of the bill saying if a municipality wants to hire somebody they can go out and do it.

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The Ombudsman said three very careful things:

"First, minimum standards should be established under Bill 130 to ensure that ombudsmen appointed at the municipal level are able to provide credible and effective service to Ontario's citizens.

"Second, Bill 130 should provide an avenue of complaint to the provincial Ombudsman on the basis that a municipality has failed to comply with legislated standards.

"Third, Bill 130 should provide that when a municipality has not appointed an ombudsman, citizens may

complain to the provincial Ombudsman about that municipality's administration."

He spoke at some considerable length in the 15 minutes and he did, on the second day, when he was not allowed to speak, send along a letter, which the member from Oxford read in its entirety into the record. So I'm not sure what time was saved by the government, because the information was totally received from the Ombudsman. Some of the more important things that he had to say, and I'm quoting here from the little synopsis:

He said, "Minimum standards should be established ... to ensure that ombudsmen appointed at the municipal level are able to provide credible and effective service to Ontario's citizens."

He said the bill "should provide an avenue of complaint to the provincial Ombudsman on the basis that a municipality has failed to comply with legislated standards."

He said the bill "should provide that when a municipality has not appointed an ombudsman, citizens may complain to the provincial Ombudsman about that municipality's administration."

He said, "A fundamental defect is that the ombudsman powers and authority are not set out in legislation."

He said, "The ombudsman should be able to compel disclosure of information and to inspect. There should ... be sanctions available to deal with individuals or organizations that fail to comply" with the ombudsman's requirement. "In addition, the ombudsman should be able to deal effectively with any reprisal against whistleblowers."

He said that under no circumstances should the ombudsman be an employee of the organization he or she oversees. The ombudsman "should have a fixed term, adequate resourcing and operational independence."

He said, "The ombudsman must be exempt from any relevant access to information legislation and not compellable, in law...."

That is what the Ombudsman had to say, but unfortunately most of what he had to say did not find its way into amendments made by the government and/or certainly none of those that were made by the opposition because none of them was passed.

The Ombudsman was quite clear that an individual appointed to a municipal ombudsman's position had to have security of tenure, that that person had to not be a municipal employee, had to be above the power of the municipality, which could not hire or fire at whim when the ombudsman was investigating municipal practice. He was very, very clear in what needed to be done in order that that person allow themselves to be called an ombudsman and not just simply a civil servant hired by the municipality and beholden to the council that put him or her into that position. That was not done, and I think for that reason, and the reason of the Ombudsman, the bill also failed.

So in conclusion, because I don't want to take too much longer—we're all getting a little tired—the bill had five major flaws when we walked in. There was the flaw

of electronic voting, which mercifully was rationalized and gone. There was the problem of the airport taxis, which appeared literally out of nowhere, but was resolved in the end with, I believe, the Toronto taxi drivers seeing that the threat of what was proposed had passed and that, in fact, the city of Toronto will have jurisdiction to stop scooping within the city of Toronto. But it was not resolved in the last three: that of closed meetings, which literally everybody disagreed with; with the provision of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which every single municipality and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario complained about, that the Lieutenant Governor in Council have authority to undo bylaws that were legitimately passed by municipalities—they were all opposed to that; and last but not least was the whole provision around the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman's role in Ontario and the ombudsmen's role when and if they are appointed in the municipalities to look into citizen involvement.

These are the problems that remain extant in the bill. They have not been resolved; they will not be going away. I know that this government will use its majority to pass this bill, but I would question in the long term whether this is the direction in which this government wants to go. I believe that passing these three particular sections will cause difficulties in the short term, and in the long term, we will see ourselves back in this Legislature, either us personally, the next group or the group after that that comes here, undoing those very parts of the bill that will prove to be problematic. Once they are out there and municipalities start holding closed meetings where they shouldn't, once it is out there and the Lieu-

tenant Governor in Council starts undoing the work of democratically elected councils, once it is out there and the ombudsmen's provisions, which have not been well-thought-out, are put into practice and people start to complain, we will find ourselves back in this House undoing what should have been done during this legislation.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Andrea Horwath): Questions and comments? Are there any questions and comments?

Is there any further debate?

Seeing none, Minister Gerretsen has moved third reading of Bill 130, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 30-minute bell.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I don't think so.

The Acting Speaker: The chief government whip has provided a deferral slip that defers this vote until 1:30 tomorrow.

Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, say "aye." Any opposed? The motion carries.

The House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2028.

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Journal des débats (Hansard)

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Mardi 19 décembre 2006

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Tuesday 19 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 19 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

INTERNET SAFETY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): Today I tabled a resolution calling on the government to declare February 7, 2007, as Safer Internet Day in the province of Ontario. The resolution was inspired by the good work of the Kids' Internet Safety Association, KINSA, a group founded to bring together people with expertise in business, law enforcement, education and public policy to address this issue.

At a media conference this morning, Paul Gillespie, the vice-chair of KINSA and a former head of the Toronto Police Service's child exploitation unit, pointed out that there are approximately 560,000 different images of children being sexually abused to be found on the Internet. The anonymity of the Internet is used to lure kids to meet these pedophiles, and it gets even scarier: According to an Industry Canada survey, 50% of kids between nine and 16 have an e-mail account their parents don't know about and 33% of children in that same age group go into adult chat rooms.

I encourage parents and grandparents to go to www.kinsa.net to learn more about this serious and growing problem. I also encourage the government to quickly adopt this resolution to assist the important work of this outstanding organization, Kids' Internet Safety Association.

GURDIAL SINGH KANWAL

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): It's an honour to rise today and tell this House about an amazing, dedicated individual in my riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale.

I have had the honour of knowing Mr. Gurdial Singh Kanwal for a number of years and consider him a friend. He's a very determined and committed individual. Mr. Kanwal is passionate about his garden. He grows everything from onions to carrots. His love and care for his garden was recently acknowledged on a worldwide scale. On October 17, 2006, Mr. Gurdial Singh Kanwal, from my riding, made the Guinness world record for the longest zucchini, which measured 7 feet, 10.3 inches.

I personally would like to congratulate him on this amazing achievement. This is an example of dedication, perseverance and hard work paying off in the end, not only through public recognition, but also through personal fulfillment.

His cultivating skills are impressive, not only because of his green thumb, but because of the time, effort and care he puts into his work. This recent recognition is only one in a long list of many in which Bramptonians are excelling. Once again, I want to congratulate him and wish him and his family all the best.

MUNICIPAL FINANCES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): When Bill 130 comes into force, municipalities will have to deal with even more new expenses.

Municipalities cannot afford another Liberal download. The cost of delivering municipal services has increased dramatically over the last few years, and provincial transfers haven't kept pace. Municipal services are suffering, infrastructure is crumbling and high property taxes are pushing people out of their homes.

Municipalities were asking for help, and instead the McGuinty Liberals tried to bury the issue until after the election with an 18-month review. The Ontario Legislature passed a resolution asking the government to complete the review more expeditiously. Over 135 municipalities have passed resolutions saying the review is needlessly drawn out and calling on the government to speed up the review, with direction coming prior to the next provincial election.

The government finally drafted the terms of reference, and they say the report won't come for 18 months. The terms of reference, in effect, give the government a veto power. After the process is finished, the government has representatives who can just veto the report and do absolutely nothing. Maybe if it hadn't taken the Liberals four months to hold a meeting, more seniors would be able to afford to stay in their homes next year.

All these municipalities want for Christmas is for the government to stop dragging its feet and to take action on this review. Why will the McGuinty Liberals not admit they were wrong and tell the committee that they need to report back sooner?

HEPATITIS C

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Whatever happened to the leftover money in the Ontario hepatitis C assistance plan? This is a very good question, which victims of tainted blood deserve an answer to.

The Ontario hepatitis C assistance plan was set up under the former government to provide financial assistance to the hep C victims outside the 1986-90 window. Two hundred million dollars was set aside to compensate these individuals, and two separate payments totalling \$25,000 were made to those who qualified. Some \$88.5 million was spent to compensate 3,450 victims, leaving some \$112 million unspent, which is the situation to this day.

In April 2005, the Minister of Health announced a task force to look at the situation facing hepatitis C victims in Ontario. When it was finally appointed, in December 2005, the task force set up a smaller working group to look at recommendations for hep C victims to make further recommendations regarding how they might be helped.

It's my understanding that some long time ago, the financial assistance working group unanimously agreed that leftover money in the assistance plan should be used to provide more help to those who had already qualified for compensation. I trust this was the recommendation that the task force then made to the minister when the report was handed in. But since then, nothing has happened.

Ontario victims of tainted blood continue to wait and wonder what this government is doing with some \$112 million that was set aside, supposedly to help them. They shouldn't have to wait because they've waited too long already. Their health is not getting any better and the least we can do is give them the financial assistance to—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

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KWANZA

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): This past Thursday, in my riding of Thornhill, the Glen Shields Public School hosted its fifth annual Kwanza celebration at the Dufferin Clark Community Centre. For your information, the first time we had the Kwanza celebration, there were only 25 people in attendance. Over the past five years, the annual Kwanza celebration has transcended its humble beginnings and has grown into a true community event with attendance by over 200 people.

The event contained several spectacular performances, including songs by the junior and intermediate choir, a traditional drum and dance ensemble, and a Kwanza candle-lighting ritual.

As you may know, Kwanza is a week-long pan-African holiday that occurs annually from December 26 to January 1. It is a time to come together as a community to renew friendship and family ties and to reflect and be thankful for our good fortune.

As we all know, Ontario is home to a multitude of diverse communities, each with a unique set of cultural traditions. In the spirit of the diversity that exists in our province, I encourage all members of this honourable House to participate in cultural events within their communities during this holiday season.

I would like to thank Neil Gunathunge, the principal of Glen Shields Public School, Oksana Majaski, community resource facilitator, and all the students and teachers at Glen Shields Public School for their hard work and extended effort in ensuring yet another successful celebration.

In the spirit of Kwanza, let the Karamu begin.

WATER LEVELS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Recently I was pleased to be invited to a luncheon hosted by the Midland Rotary Club. The guest speaker at the luncheon was Ms. Mary Muter, who is a cottager on Georgian Bay, a member of the Georgian Bay Association and a person who has devoted endless hours to the ecology and water levels on Georgian Bay and Lake Huron.

The Georgian Bay Association, through its foundation, at a cost of \$250,000, paid for the Baird water level report. The report concluded that erosion and the continual and ongoing dredging of the St. Clair River are causing water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay to drop at a greater rate than ever before.

The Baird report convinced the International Joint Commission that the erosion of the St. Clair River is in fact a major cause of low water levels on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. In Simcoe North, we have a lot at stake with water levels that continue to decline.

To begin with, the property values of shoreline properties are impacted because the high-water mark keeps moving further way from the property lines and buildings, making it at times almost impossible for dockage. Second, with thousands of boats on Georgian Bay, some marinas are finding it more difficult for larger boats to access their locations. Third, with the drop in water levels, our precious wetlands are also in jeopardy, as many have begun to actually dry up, putting a strain on our natural heritage system and wildlife.

It is now well documented that Georgian Bay and Lake Huron are approximately 40 centimetres lower than the levels recorded in 1918. Georgian Bay is part of the culture of our region. We need to address the concerns raised in the Baird report so that future generations can enjoy the natural beauty of beautiful Georgian Bay.

I know the federal government has committed to some mitigation funding; Ministers Ambrose and Clement made the announcement in September. It is imperative that the McGuinty Liberals show true leadership and become key players at the table so that a solution can be found to stop declining water levels in our Great Lakes.

DISASTER RELIEF

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I rise today to applaud this government's announcement that the town of Fort Erie will be receiving up to \$1.8 million under the disaster relief assistance program.

On October 12 and 13 of this year, unprecedented amounts of lake-effect snow deluged that area, all across the southern tier of the Niagara Peninsula. Fort Erie received 30 centimetres of snow in one day, setting a single-day and monthly record for October. High winds uprooted trees and shattered branches, blocking many roadways, and major damage to the power grid caused a blackout that lasted for days in some areas.

The magnitude of the cleanup and emergency response led to significant costs for the municipality and tremendous hardship for the residents and businesses in the area.

The province will make an advance payment of over \$900,000 to assist the municipality with its costs after the severe snowstorm in October. The Ontario disaster relief assistance program is a provincial program that covers extraordinary, unmanageable public damages. In response to a request from the town, the province declared the town a disaster area under the program. This enables the government to provide financial assistance to the municipality.

I particularly want to commend my colleague the member for Niagara Falls, Kim Craiton, who I know advocated very strongly for the people of Fort Erie in the wake of this storm and kept their plight in the spotlight here at Queen's Park.

LONDON MARCONI CLUB

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I rise in this House today to say thank you to the London Italian Marconi Club in my riding of London-Fanshawe, that was the host of a wonderful dinner on Sunday night for London's less fortunate.

The London Marconi Club is a wonderful organization that every year provides a special holiday feast for those who otherwise might not be able to enjoy such a meal. The annual dinner is sponsored by many different local companies in London, and I would like to take this time to thank all of them.

I am proud to say that I was joined by many of my colleagues this past Sunday: the Honourable Mr. Chris Bentley and Mr. Ernie Hardeman; and also Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco-Best and Councillor Roger Caranci.

Not only did the Marconi Club provide a superb meal of turkey, mashed potatoes and vegetables, but there were door prizes such as frozen turkeys for families to take home for a nice hot meal. We also had a very special guest of honour. Santa came to the dinner and gave out treats to all the boys and girls who came with their families.

I would like again to thank the local companies and also the Marconi Club for their generosity and for open-

ing the place every year to provide such an important meal for people who cannot afford to buy one.

I want to take this opportunity to wish everyone in this House a happy Christmas and, hopefully, a happy new year.

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I rise to inform the Legislature of more good news in the health care sector for the riding of Huron-Bruce and the province of Ontario.

Yesterday I had the chance to announce funding increases from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for land ambulance services for both Huron and Bruce counties. This announcement was part of the McGuinty government's second-phase investment of \$50 million into the program for 2007. Overall, our government has planned to spend approximately \$300 million over three years in order to strengthen the 50-50 cost sharing program with municipalities. This cost sharing program will see our government share equally the cost of operating the land ambulance program with the municipalities by 2008 in order to further strengthen this service that helps so many lives in Ontario.

I'm very pleased to say that the riding of Huron-Bruce was the recipient of this funding. The financial commitment was \$956,566 for 2007, and this is after a similar announcement for last year as well. This represents an increase of \$648,769 for Huron county and \$307,797 for Bruce county.

This is part of the McGuinty government's commitment to upload the services of ambulances and make good on the commitment of 50-50 funding for ambulance—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

VISITORS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I beg the indulgence of the House to introduce and welcome my son, Christopher Cowperthwaite, to the Legislature. He has been out of the country for a year and we're glad to have him back.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I hope the whole House will join me in welcoming my niece, Ms. Lee Chrysler, to the House today. She is a third-year political science student at the University of Guelph.

APPOINTMENT OF
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I've laid upon the table an order in council appointing Dr. George Pasut as acting chief medical officer of health for a six-month term commencing on December 13, 2006, pursuant to an address of this assembly on December 12, 2006.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I beg leave to present a report on agencies, boards and commissions, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., from the standing committee on government agencies and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mrs. Munro: This report is the third in the series of three that we have done as a committee over the last few months. I'd like to thank all of those who participated. I also want to point out that this report contains two dissenting opinions.

At this time, I would move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

Ms. Mossop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 177, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 177, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): This bill addresses two key issues brought to me by injured workers in Ontario. The first says that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board will consider employment or business positions which are both suitable and available to the worker when determining the worker's post-injury earnings, and second, it will permit additional circumstances when the board may review a worker's loss-of-earnings benefit after the 72-month lock-in.

I would like to thank Rob Walters, Bill Wrye and Steve Peters for their help and support in crafting this bill.

TRUTH AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA VÉRITÉ ET LA TRANSPARENCE AU SEIN DU SYSTÈME JURIDIQUE

Mr. Tory moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 178, An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act with respect to truth and transparency in the justice system / Projet de loi 178, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires en ce qui a trait à la vérité et à la transparence au sein du système juridique.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): In so many areas, we have learned that the first step in identifying a problem, getting a handle on the problem and then determining, as we're charged to do here, ways to fix that problem is to collect and make available to the public more information. In this case, this bill seeks to address something that I think is very worrisome, namely that our justice system is in trouble in terms of declining public confidence. This bill, the Truth and Transparency in the Justice System Act, will let the sun shine in and let more information be made available to the public through collection across the province by the government so that we can see, on things like plea bargains and sentencing deals, that justice is not only being done but we'll see how it's being done and we'll actually see it being done at the same time. I look forward to the debate on the bill.

ONTARIO CLIMATE CHANGE ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LES CHANGEMENTS CLIMATIQUES EN ONTARIO

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 179, An Act to provide for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario / Projet de loi 179, Loi prévoyant la réduction des émissions de gaz à effet de serre en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): Climate change is a profound challenge to the stability of our society. This bill provides a framework for action in Ontario, setting out targets and timelines that have to be achieved in order to actually have an impact on that challenge. I believe it's a realistic bill that should set the framework within which all other climate change legislation should be introduced in this House.

VISITORS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: With your indulgence I'd like to introduce a grade school from the great riding of Davenport, called the Pauline Junior Public School, and their teacher, Megan Hickman. They came to watch how a bill becomes law. Thank you, and congratulations.

DEFERRED VOTES

MUNICIPAL STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2006LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
CONCERNANT LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 130, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 130, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1356 to 1401.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Patten, Richard
Bartolucci, Rick	Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve
Bentley, Christopher	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Bradley, James J.	Kular, Kuldip	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Leal, Jeff	Ramal, Khalil
Bryant, Michael	Marsales, Judy	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Rinaldi, Lou
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McGuinty, Dalton	Ruprecht, Tony
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Sergio, Mario
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Duguid, Brad	Oraziotti, David	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	O'Toole, John
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLeod, Lisa	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter
Elliott, Christine	Martel, Shelley	Tory, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wilson, Jim
Horwath, Andrea	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 51; the nays are 24.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

VISITORS

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of the members to the members' gallery where my family is visiting today. I have three of my nieces here: Elizabeth Green, Jennie Winchester and, particularly today, Corporal Christie Green, who has just returned safe and sound from Kandahar.

She was the development adviser to the Canadian military operation and the major general here for the last eight months. Thank you for being here. We're very gratified.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BAIL VIOLATIONS

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Premier, last month we heard about the case of a man in London who was charged with shooting four people in a downtown parking lot during the Thanksgiving weekend. He was granted bail on the condition that he reside with a relative in Toronto. The individual subsequently disappeared, and his whereabouts are at this point in time unknown.

Stories like this, we believe, seriously erode the confidence Ontarians have in their justice system, and they raise serious questions about whether or not that system is in fact working. Will the Premier advise the House as to how many cases of this kind take place in Ontario each year?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I know the leader of the official opposition knows the decision of a crown attorney has to be, and ought to be, a quasi-judicial one. It has to be an independent one. It ought not to be either popular or unpopular. We in this government support the independence of crown attorneys' discretion. Of course, the policy of crown attorneys when it comes to gun crime is to vigorously prosecute those charges and to oppose bail. That is the policy and that is the practice of the crown, to oppose bail in gun crime charges. That is the policy and the practice and that is the approach, one that we have made public for the first time by the publication of the crown policy manual and one we will continue to work on.

Mr. Tory: It may well be the policy, it may well be the practice, but that wasn't an answer to the question. The question has nothing to do with popularity and it has nothing to do with any kind of assault or infringement on anybody's independence.

The reason that the Attorney General can't answer the question is that he doesn't know the answer. It's odd, because the government of Ontario does assign people to keep track of every egg laid every year in Ontario—the number, in fact, was 228,889,000 in 2005—but they

can't tell us important information about bail and sentencing.

Jane Creba was killed last Boxing Day. Several of the suspects in that case were already out on bail on previous charges at the time of that incident. Media reports would suggest there are no consequences for people violating bail, because surety guarantees posted by others aren't collected on. Can the Premier tell this House, of all the bail violations that occur each year in Ontario, in how many of those cases are the guarantors actually expected to pay up on the sureties? In how many cases are they paying up? What percentage?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: The member mentioned that terrible tragedy that took place Boxing Day last year. He will know that before that happened, about a year ago, the Premier sat down with the OPP commissioner, with Toronto Police Chief Blair, with a chief prosecutor for the province and with his justice ministers to see if we're doing everything that we can be doing. Then what happened, in January, was the largest single expansion of our criminal justice enterprise in the history of this province. A provincial operations centre was established and will be operational very soon. We had a guns and gangs task force expanded exponentially with prosecutors working with police officers. And this week we learned of the new major crimes court that has been opened, the first of its kind in Ontario, very unique in this country. So that our policy of—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

1410

Mr. Tory: Well, that was very interesting, but again, no answer to the question. The question is simply why we can't have, the public can't have, information related to plea bargains and sentencing deals, in aggregate, collected across the province so we know what's going on. The government of Ontario has people in place to track how many calls there are to the bear wise hotline that reach a live operator—10,536 between April and November 2005—but we can't tell people how many sureties are collected for bail violators or how many plea bargains are entered into across the province. This is why people are losing faith in our justice system. We want to open it up so that people can see what's happening, get the facts on the table across the province, and report them to the public. I introduced the Truth and Transparency in the Justice System Act today. Victims' groups support this, such as Victims of Violence, Sharon Rosenfeldt, co-chair, who says, "This bill ... would help measure whether victims of crime are truly having justice served."

My question to the Premier: Will you support this bill? Will you act to open the justice system up and let people see what's going on and be able to judge for themselves?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I'm reminded of what our chief justice said, one of our greatest Attorneys General, Roy McMurtry, just a few years ago when a similar attempt was made by the Progressive Conservative Party to engage in an act of legal populism that would try and put pressure on either the quasi-judicial decision made by

crown attorneys or the judicial decision made by judges. What Roy McMurtry said was that the people of this province are best served by an independent and impartial judiciary that seeks to find a just result. We take that for granted, but from time to time it has to be restated. The chief justice was right when he said that then, he's right to say it now, and our government will continue to restate those important principles of independence that every single Ontarian has a right to and we will continue to defend.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. There's nothing in that bill whatsoever that threatens anyone's independence at all.

To the Premier: The centrepiece of the Dalton McGuinty election campaign, and the re-election campaign that's sure to come—the promise to reduce wait times—lies in tatters. We have the wait time commercials that have been found by Advertising Standards Canada to be in violation of the Canadian code of advertising standards. The government of Ontario is a member of the advertising standards council. They obviously take the responsibilities that go with that organization and membership in it very seriously.

Will the Premier please tell us what the specific response of his government was when they were contacted by the advertising standards council to respond to the complaint that had been made? Did he say to them that the ad had been approved by the Auditor General and that that was good enough, or did he say that he was not going to abide by whatever ruling came from the advertising standards council? Or did he say that the membership of the government of Ontario in this body didn't matter and that, in fact, he was going to resign? What did he say when the advertising standards council called to say they had real troubles with these ads that they found inaccurate? What did he say?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The leader of the official opposition knows that that ad was specifically approved by the Auditor General. He knows that wait times are coming down in the province of Ontario.

But there's still more good news today. The minister is announcing a new MRI in Guelph and a new MRI in Brantford. Each of those machines can perform over 4,000 scans annually. Since taking office, there have been 10 brand new additional MRI machines replacing another seven older models. We've increased the number of MRI scans in Ontario by 78%, and wait times in that area alone have gone down by 13%, or 16 days.

Mr. Tory: In light of his record, I don't know how the Premier can expect anyone to believe anything that he just said. He would say anything to try and win a vote.

The facts are incontrovertible. The government of Ontario launched a website that they said was "up to date" and "accurate." That website was found by the Auditor General to be misleading, that the numbers in it should be

taken with a grain of salt. They ran ads to extol the virtues of all of this which have been found by Advertising Standards Canada to make “inaccurate claims” and to “omit relevant information.” That’s the independent body that looks at ads from across the province. These are ads that said people could phone a number and get their wait time down, but when you phoned, nothing happened; they told you nothing that would help at all.

We believe that an acknowledgement and an apology are due to the people of Ontario whose money you spent—millions of dollars—putting ads on television that have been found by objective bodies to be misleading and inaccurate. Will you do the right thing and apologize and formally retract these bogus ads?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: You know, the leader of the official opposition likes to choose his independent experts. The Auditor General, again I say, approved this ad.

Other communities that have benefited from new MRI machines: Guelph, Brantford, Orillia, Niagara Falls, Windsor, Markham, Richmond Hill, two in Ottawa, and Owen Sound. This stands in stark contrast to the previous Conservative government record, which privatized MRI services and put in place for-profit clinics that offered fewer hours. We’re bringing online new MRIs, and we’re proud to be getting our wait times down.

Mr. Tory: In this case, your government is a member of the organization. When you say, “We choose our experts,” you chose to belong to the organization that found your ads to omit relevant information and to be inaccurate. You chose to belong to that organization, and you’re repudiating them now.

It’s not just us calling for an apology; here’s an editorial from the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*, published today. It’s called, “Apology Needed over Wait Times.” I quote:

“This is serious criticism. It is the type of criticism that should have prompted an apology from Smitherman, the minister. No such apology appears to be coming....

“After the government’s policies on wait times have been condemned twice by reputable agencies, the residents of Ontario can’t be blamed if they conclude that the provincial government has deliberately attempted to confuse patients. The government has no one other than itself to blame for weakening its credibility.”

Premier, my question is this: You should have learned from your famous 2003 “I will not raise your taxes” ad. Will you stand in your place, in light of these objective findings about the ads and these numbers, and apologize to the people of Ontario, as the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* suggests you should, and formally retract these ads?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition did not like our new law requiring that any of these ads be vetted by the Auditor General. He does not like the fact that this ad was specifically approved by the Auditor General. He is not prepared to accept the fact that in Ontario, wait times are coming down. Whether you look at median wait times, whether you look at average wait times or whether you look at 90th-percentile wait times, wait times are coming down. He does not appreciate the fact that we have enlisted some of the best

experts in the country with respect to the best way to present that information, which in the past had never been collected. We’re now collecting that information; we’re presenting it. The Auditor General says he takes issue with the way we present it. We’ve asked Senator Kirby to give us his best advice so we can reconcile the competing and conflicting opinions we’re getting from our medical experts and the Auditor General. We will do what we need to do to make sure that the people of Ontario continue to see that their wait times are in fact coming down.

MEMBERS’ COMPENSATION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): My question is for the Premier. This morning, Dalton McGuinty defended his outrageous MPP pay hike by telling Ontario’s lowest-paid workers to “sit back and eat popcorn.” I wish Ontario’s lowest-paid workers enjoyed the luxury of sitting back and eating popcorn; they don’t. They’re on the job, working longer and harder than ever trying to make ends meet.

Premier, why do MPPs deserve 31% more but Ontario’s lowest-paid workers have to wait until February for 25 cents more? Why won’t you raise the minimum wage to a living wage—\$10 an hour?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister responsible for democratic renewal.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I’d like to say to the honourable member that what this bill is about is closing the gap between what hard-working members of provincial Parliament make and what our counterparts in Ottawa make. It’s a 40% gap. The value of the work we do here needs to be represented in the salary, and yet we still will have a 25% gap between what we make and what our federal counterparts make. We share the same constituents, we share the same ridings, and many would argue that our work is harder. We’re closer to our constituents. Ottawa funds health care and education; we implement it. This is about closing a gap. It’s something that has been needed for the last 15 years. For 10 of those 15 years, we’ve had cutbacks or freezing of our salaries. This is fair, it’s reasonable and we make no apologies for doing it.

Ms. DiNovo: If we want to talk about a gap, why don’t we talk about the gap between a 3% raise for the poorest among us and the 31% raise for those in the 5% top income bracket, who are MPPs in this room?

The Premier may think the issue of fair wages is one big joke. I can assure him, it’s no laughing matter for the 1.2 million Ontarians who earn less than \$10 an hour, most of them women, immigrants and single parents. Why is the Premier doing for himself what he refuses to do for others in a season that calls on generosity? Why don’t you raise the minimum wage to a living wage: \$10 an hour?

1420

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: It's this government that raised the minimum wage, which was frozen for 10 years.

Interjection: You voted against it.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: And you voted against it.

We are voting for this bill and we are accepting the pay increase because we know the value of the work that we do here and we can explain that to our constituents. I'd like to know how the NDP is going to vote against this bill and still take the money. That represents something encompassed in a word that is unparliamentary and that I cannot use here, but no better word could ever be used today.

The hard work that we do here, contrary to what your colleague, your House leader, said today on one of the TV shows, that we take months of vacation every year—does he not realize that he mars your reputation as well as the reputation of all of us here? We're all hard-working. You're hard-working; the Tories are hard-working; the Liberals are hard-working. This bill begins to close a gap, and it's about time.

Ms. DiNovo: If this government doesn't give their money to the poorest among us, the New Democratic Party is certainly not going to leave more money in their hands so that they can give themselves more money and their own cronies a raise.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. I need to be able to hear the member for Parkdale-High Park place her question. We need to be quiet even when I sit down. Member for Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. DiNovo: Dalton McGuinty can ram through a 31% MPP pay hike in seven sessional days, but at the rate your government is going, minimum wage earners will wait seven long years before they earn \$10 an hour. That's a disgraceful double standard. In 1972, the minimum wage was \$2 an hour. Taking inflation into account, that's \$10 an hour today. That means the poor are poorer now than they were in 1972.

You're moving heaven and earth to give yourselves a raise. Why can't you find the time, energy and courage to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour, a living wage?

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: If the honourable member actually believed what she said, she would opt out of the pay raise instead of voting against it and taking it.

With respect to donations to charity, that's honourable; we all donate to charity. But we'll be looking forward to a year-by-year receipt made to the public until they retire or lose their seat, as far as where those monies are going.

Here's what Professor Wiseman at the University of Toronto says: "If we use public sector standards, MPPs are dramatically underpaid."

Marilyn Churley, former NDP member, who had to try federally: "I think there are reasonable grounds ... for a salary increase."

David Christopherson: "The constituency responsibility is as great, if not greater, in terms of just the raw numbers of casework that comes in."

It's a shame the front row—Mr. Hampton and the member for Nickel Belt—took a million-dollar buyout in 1995, and yet they can't turn around and value their own colleagues when it comes to pay and salary. That's a shame. I need to use a word that is unparliamentary, and we all know what that word is. If you don't want the increase, don't take it. It's in the bill. Don't be inconsistent.

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to you, Mr. Premier, because the buck stops with you. For the last two years, I have been bringing one man's story to the floor of this Legislature. Brian Woods has struggled with advancing complications from diabetes, an illness that many hold at bay by a combination of diet and medicine. Brian fought for a special diet supplement. He went all the way to the Ombudsman. He won his case. You and your government then shattered his health and well-being by cutting his special diet supplement in half through your new regulations.

My question is a serious and simple one: How do you explain to Brian that you deserve a 31% pay hike while he and thousands of others are told to do without the food they need to lead healthy lives?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I want to reiterate what I've said on what the member of the third party asks quite often with regard to the special diet allowance. As you know, we have asked for a review of the special diet allowance, because this allowance is to go to people who have a medical condition requiring a diet. If they are not satisfied with the decision of the Social Benefits Tribunal, they can appeal it to the tribunal, and there is a good process to do that. When the Social Benefits Tribunal turns down the decision of the ministry, the benefit is reinstated. That's what happened. That is the process—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Prue: In the case of Mr. Woods, the Social Benefits Tribunal said that the changes you made to the regulations, those cruel new rules that you imposed on disabled people, have, and I use their words, "created hardship" for Mr. Woods. In fact, they said that it was going to drive him into the hospital. That was an understatement. Brian is watching today from a hospital room in Lindsay, Ontario, while he awaits the amputation of his legs. That's what he's watching today, Madame Minister, as you speak. This is what he wants to see you answer. It got progressively worse as he waited for the

special foods he needed to assist in the healing process, the foods he was never able to afford or get.

I'm asking you because the Premier doesn't want to answer it. Will you give up even a part of your pay hike to ensure that Brian and others have the ability to feed themselves, this Christmas and into the new year, the food they need so as not to be in hospital?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: First of all, I'm not going to answer the second question, because when the decision is made here that we have an increase, I will take the increase. I will not do like them, hiding behind all sorts of excuses not to take the increase. At the end of the day, they will all take the increase. Trust me.

I want to just give some statistics to the member of the party opposite. In 1998-99, 4,353 people received a special diet allowance; in 2006-07, 91,000 people are receiving a special diet allowance. I'm telling you that every person who needs a special diet because of their medical condition is receiving the special diet.

Mr. Prue: What the minister doesn't state is that the amount they're getting is less than half of what they got a year before you changed the regulations. That's the problem with Mr. Woods and that's the problem with everyone else.

It's all well and good for everyone to stand up here and talk about how important it is that we get a pay raise for a better life, but you're forgetting people like Mr. Woods, who is waiting there in the hospital, waiting to have his leg amputated. You're forgetting them. We are fighting to make sure that sick and disabled people get the nutrition they need through the special diet supplement. I wish you would too.

My question to you is very simple. Don't have the Premier tell them they can eat popcorn, people like Brian Woods, who can't survive on popcorn. Will you apologize for the remark made by your Premier, and will you reinstate the special diet that he and others so desperately need so that they don't end up in hospital, so that they don't have their leg amputated? That's what we want to hear.

1430

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Again, I want to say to the member of the NDP that if a person needs a special diet and if it's supported by the medical community, they will get the special diet.

I guess I understand, from what the member is saying, that he is not going to take the increase in salary. He has not said it clearly, but it shows that he's not going to take it. It's unfortunate that this party chooses to parade the misery of their constituents here in the House.

If the tribunal has decided otherwise, this person will get this special diet allowance. I'm not at liberty to talk about cases here and I'm not going to talk about cases, but I can guarantee everyone here and all Ontarians that if they need a special diet, they will get it.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is to the Premier. Premier, with the demise of the manufacturing sector in Ontario, with over a 10% contraction so far across the province and much more to come, we know our future depends on research and innovation.

Last week I asked you about the fate of the Turfgrass Institute in Guelph and your plans to close the station and sell the land upon which it sits. You sloughed off the question to not one but two different ministers, neither of whom was the Minister of Research and Innovation. And, by the way, neither of them answered my question.

Further details have emerged about the potential closing of two more research stations in Ontario: that located in Simcoe, in Norfolk county, and Vineland Research Station in the Niagara Peninsula.

Premier, will you commit today to leaving these valuable research institutions untouched until they change hands to the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario on April 1 of next year, leaving their fate in the hands of researchers and not in the hands of land developers? Will you commit to do that today, please?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): While the honourable member suggested I didn't answer it the last time, I would ask you to listen very carefully, because I intend to answer it again today.

First of all, with respect to our Premier's commitment to research and innovation, our Premier has listened to the agriculture stakeholders in the province of Ontario, and that is why he committed—and we are following through—to have the research stations right across the province transferred to the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario. That's what the stakeholders said was needed. Unlike the previous government, which did not take this action, our Premier has made it happen.

What that means is that it is now the research institute that will direct how best the provincial resources will be deployed to ensure that our research initiatives are accomplished as we have said they should be and as we are investing in those initiatives. So it's the ARIO that will have the responsibility to ensure—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Chudleigh: The Premier's office and your office, I'm sure, are receiving copies of letters from ministry stakeholders and researchers alike imploring you not to sell off this land. The important research conducted on these research stations is tied directly to the land upon which they sit. Selling them would set research projects back years, if not decades, in Ontario.

If you're the champion of research and innovation, as your government claims to be, stand up for the researchers at these valuable research stations and ensure that they do not fall into the hands of developers before that transfer date of April 1. They're not going to be trans-

ferred until April 1. Will they be transferred on that date, intact, in the same location that they are located in today?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: First of all, I think it's important to caution the honourable member not to speculate on when the parties that are negotiating the transfer of these lands—on when that will be completed. I think it is really very surprising that a member from that party that slashed research dollars in the province of Ontario—you slashed them; you allowed these research facilities to crumble in their communities. You now stand up in your place, you've found religion, and you want to see some investment in research.

What I can say is that this government and this Premier have led investment in research. We have put \$3 million into a research chair at the University of Guelph. We have invested \$25 million for the research lab at the University of Guelph. We have invested \$2.5 million in the agri-food innovation awards that are going to be announced very soon. We also announced in the last budget—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

COAL-FIRED GENERATING STATIONS

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Premier. With Christmas less than a week away, experts warn that the ice at the North Pole could entirely disappear in summertime by 2040 as a result of climate change. In a campaign to save his homeland from climate change, Santa dropped by this place today and asked me to present you with a stocking with a large piece of coal in it to commemorate your broken promises to shut down coal plants in this province by 2007, then 2009. Premier, when will you stop breaking your promises on coal and move to a very aggressive energy efficiency and conservation program for Ontario's energy and climate protection needs?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): First of all, I thank the member for the question. I want to welcome Jack Gibbons today, who is a relentless advocate with the Ontario Clean Air Alliance.

We are moving as aggressively as we can and in a responsible fashion. We cannot compromise the reliability of our electricity system. The fact is, we have made some real progress. We're reducing emissions and making a difference. We've reduced our reliance on coal by 17%; mercury emissions by 33%; sulphur dioxide emissions by 28%; NO_x by 34%; carbon dioxide, which obviously contributes to climate change, by 15%.

We are the only government in North America that is shunning new coal-fired generation and that has made a specific commitment to phase out coal-fired generation. At a time when the rest of the world is going one way, we're going the other way. Ontarians can take pride in knowing that they are leaders in the fight for clean air.

Mr. Tabuns: I have to say, Mr. Premier, that Mr. Gibbons is here with some plainclothes elves, and I don't think they're particularly impressed by your response.

Earlier today, I introduced the Ontario Climate Change Act. It does two things. First, it mandates the creation of a climate change plan that meets Ontario's reductions under the Kyoto Protocol. As well, it requires further reductions beyond 2012, and it empowers the Environmental Commissioner to review the climate change plan for content and to ensure that reductions are achieved.

Premier, if you're serious about addressing climate change, will you give future generations of Ontario children an early Christmas present and commit to speedy passage of my Ontario Climate Change Act?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: What I can say is this: It's important that we have an intelligent debate about how quickly we can move with respect to phasing out coal-fired generation. But let's remember that at a time when most of North America and much of the world is expanding their reliance on coal, we are steadily reducing ours.

This summer I read a great book called *The Weather Makers*. It tells me that worldwide, there are going to be 249 more coal plants built by 2009. On top of that, there are going to be 483 more built by 2019. On top of that, there are going to be another 710 coal-fired plants built by 2070. We stand as a single, solitary beacon to the world. We are saying that we are not building more coal-fired generation in Ontario. More than that, we are phasing out coal-fired generation in Ontario. They are contemplating the construction of new coal-fired generation today in Alberta and BC. We are the only jurisdiction that's going the other way. Ontarians can take pride in the fact that we're phasing out coal-fired generation in Ontario.

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is for the Minister of Labour. I know that a top priority for the minister has been improving workplace health and safety in Ontario. For example, when this government took office in 2003, Ontario had the lowest ratio of health and safety inspectors in Canada. Since then, the McGuinty government has hired 200 new inspectors, nearly doubling their ranks; helped reduce lost-time injuries by more than 14,500 in only two years; extended Occupational Health and Safety Act coverage to farming operations; renewed and strengthened the WSIB; and the list goes on.

But today, I want to ask the minister about what he's doing to confront the increasing problem of repetitive strain injuries in the workplace. Some 42% of all lost-time injuries reported by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board are ergonomic-related, an unacceptable number, and I want to ask the minister what he's doing to deal with these specific workplace injuries.

1440

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I want to thank the member for the question. "Ergonomic" is a challenging word to deliver. So is "musculoskeletal" disorders, and that's what ergonomic-related issues are.

I want to thank the member for raising it, because it is extremely important. Yes, our priorities are much different than what other governments had. We realize that we need to ensure that we have ergonomists on staff to provide specialized assistance to our inspectors.

In 2004, my predecessor introduced an ergonomic subcommittee to make recommendations as to how we move forward in dealing with ergonomic-related issues. As well, we moved forward within the Ministry of Labour on the related recommendations: raising awareness, enhancing training, better tracking of ergonomic-related inspections and increasing ergonomic expertise.

Last January, as well, we launched the pains and strains campaign to improve employer and worker awareness. But I think the most important initiative that we've moved forward with is hiring a new provincial ergonomist. This position was destroyed by the Conservatives.

Mr. Milloy: I am pleased that the government is working to reduce ergonomic injuries. Far too many Ontarians suffer disorders developed in their workplace. We all know someone who has suffered the cumulative effects of repetitive, stressful or awkward movements on bones, joints, ligaments and other soft tissues, and we all know the costs associated with these workplace injuries, including the unquantifiable costs in human suffering as well as the all-too-quantifiable costs associated with lost productivity.

While some businesses do recognize these costs and take measures to meet and exceed expectations when protecting their workers, sadly others do not. I want to ask the minister how having a new provincial ergonomist is going to better protect our workers from ergonomic-related injuries and other types of disorders.

Hon. Mr. Peters: The costs are too huge not to move forward with this position.

Some members may wonder about repetitive strain injury. Well, I watched many of you in this House signing your Christmas cards over and over again. That has the potential for repetitive strain injury, even for MPPs.

But the costs are huge: over 40,000 musculoskeletal injuries every year in this province; over \$1 billion a year in costs to the economy in this province.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Peters: I hear the double-dippers on the other side chipping away at this issue, but the double-dippers have taken no interest in the initiatives that we have brought forward.

We recognize the importance of bringing back a position that was removed by the Conservatives, such as the provincial ergonomist. We're proud to have an individual like Anne Duffy coming forward as our new provincial ergonomist. Anne has 20 years' experience in this important issue. One billion dollars' annual cost—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: On May 18, 2004, you dropped a bomb on the

people of Ontario when you announced your so-called health tax, coming down hard on the backs of working families and seniors in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Some have suggested this was the mother of all broken promises. Now, two and a half years later, we find out that taxpayers will be effectively paying your so-called health tax twice: first, your initial tax gouge, and now, secondly, because of decisions by arbitrators with respect to public sector employers covering the health tax for their employees. Premier, are you really intent on putting the health tax boots to working families and taxpayers not once but twice?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The member will know that the Court of Appeal has decided that the courts will defer to the decisions of arbitrators on the interpretation of provisions in collective agreements relating to this particular issue.

As we have always said, the interpretation of the collective agreements is a matter for the arbitrators, and we will not comment on any matters that may be before any arbitrators.

Mr. Hudak: With all due respect, Premier, what a bunch of nonsense. To read your own words back to you, on October 27, 2004, you told the assembly, "If this situation persists, then we will take the necessary steps to introduce whatever clarity is required. Our intention remains the same today as it was from the outset: This is something that should be paid by taxpayers," meaning "not employers." That's what you said then. You say something entirely different today. In fact, you're intent on, again, pulling another McGuinty: saying one thing one time and saying the opposite when the going gets tough.

Premier, please tell me. The people at the Hamilton fire department are now paying \$300,000 more in taxes because of this decision. The LaPointe-Fisher Nursing Home in Guelph is going to face an administrative nightmare. Premier, please tell me you're not so obsessed with tax increases that you're going to put the boots to taxpayers two times for your infamous health tax gouge.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The member will also know, as I think the Minister of Finance related just yesterday or the day before, that 51 out of 60 decisions by arbitrators have ruled in favour of the employer, so that the individuals are required to pay. Our intention has always been crystal clear: that the Ontario health premium is a tax and not the OHIP premium that had previously been imposed under the Health Insurance Act. Again, this is a matter to be decided ultimately, though, by the arbitrators.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who always asks me to ask him questions. Minister, in last month's municipal elections, literally thousands upon thousands of mail-in ballots were rejected because of flaws in what your ministry has approved: the postal

ballot system. In Minden Hills, one very good example of the 849 rejected ballots, 256 were initially rejected because the obligatory signed declaration was improperly inserted inside the secrecy envelope. The large numbers of spoiled mail-in ballots seriously undermine voter trust in the democratic process at the local level.

Minister, I saw you musing in the paper today that you're going to study it. We don't need it to be studied; we need to know from you—the mail-in ballot system is clearly broken. We need you to say that, and we need you to say what you are going to do to fix it—not what you're going to do to study it; what you're going to do to fix it.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I thank the member for the question. It's always been the approach of this government and particularly this ministry that if certain issues are brought forward, yes, we do like to study the issues. We like to get a comprehensive view as to what's happening out there. We will be making recommendations to make changes to make sure that everyone's vote is counted.

We value the democratic process that we have in this province to the fullest. We are pleased that the municipal elections, of which there were literally hundreds across the province in over 450 municipalities, went off as well as they did. There were some isolated issues. We are going to look at them and we're going to make improvements to them.

Mr. Prue: The issues were not particularly isolated; they were mostly in rural Ontario. Last week, judges in Bracebridge and Lindsay both ordered that ballots declared spoiled because of problems with the signed declaration be counted. They saw clearly that your regulations did not work. The judges' ruling shows just how flawed the current mail-in ballot system truly is.

My question again: Other than study it some more, what are you going to do to ensure that the votes of Ontarians who believe they are voting correctly are going to be counted in local elections and not be rejected because of your regulations?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: The member will well remember the days when the only way one could vote was by actually going to the voting booth or voting by proxy. What governments have done over the last number of years is to make sure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity to vote, so the mail-in ballot has been one issue that has actually been added to the method of voting, I guess a number of years ago.

There were some issues this time around; there were some problems. We want to know what the problems are. Yes, we are going to study it, but we're going to do better than that. Once we've studied it, we're going to come up with some recommendations so that the kind of problems that arose during the last election will not occur the next time. It's absolutely important that every eligible voter in this province, whether voting provincially, federally or municipally, is given the opportunity to do so, and this government is determined to make that happen.

1450

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. As the population of Ontario grows, municipalities around the province need to build new infrastructure as well as upgrade existing infrastructure facilities. In the past, previous governments neglected infrastructure and municipalities. However, my constituents know that building infrastructure is a priority to ensure that Ontario can stay competitive economically and allow us to maintain our exceptional quality of life. Municipalities in Ontario now require new and innovative ways to fund capital projects.

Minister, are there any financing tools available to them so they can help build the infrastructure they need?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): The member for London–Fanshawe is correct that infrastructure is a priority for this government and indeed for all Ontarians. We know that municipalities need many new ways to finance projects that are important, like clean water, waste management, roads and bridges or renewal of social housing.

That's why, in 2004, under the leadership of this finance minister, we created the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority, or OSIFA. OSIFA provides low-cost, affordable loans to municipalities to ensure that valuable infrastructure can be built by and for municipalities.

In 2005, the OSIFA mandate was broadened to include municipal culture, tourism and recreation infrastructure as well as Ontario's universities. In July of this year, OSIFA was merged with Infrastructure Ontario and continues to offer loans at affordable rates to help municipalities and the broader public sector deliver infrastructure projects. It is just one tool, innovative as it is, to deliver even more infrastructure. I look forward to the supplementary.

Mr. Ramal: I would like to thank the minister for his response. My constituents appreciate that this government is listening to the municipalities and providing them with options for financing their infrastructure programs. As municipalities across the province expand and their populations grow, there are other areas that need addressing.

I know that local hydro providers need financing tools as this government expands power generation. I know that this government has made transit a priority, and as local transit authorities expand and provide expanded services to families, these operations need to finance new projects. As we make our streets safer and hire more police officers, municipalities will need to build new police stations.

Minister, will you listen to municipalities and make sure that we continue to expand the loan program and help municipalities make their investments to accommodate these priorities?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: We always listen to Ontarians, but I've got to tell you, the member for London–Fanshawe is one of the most passionate advocates of them all. So I am very happy to inform this House that we are indeed expanding Infrastructure Ontario's OSIFA loan program once again.

I know that a good number of communities in south-western Ontario that this member advocates for have already benefited from more than \$2.8 billion in low-cost, longer-term loans for over 1,200 infrastructure projects. We're expanding the program's scope and eligibility to include municipal corporations such as hydro utilities, transit corporations, universities, federated and affiliated colleges and not-for-profit long-term-care service providers.

The program will strengthen their capacity to finance and build new infrastructure projects and improve the delivery of these critical public services. Municipalities will now be able to borrow for investments in capital projects like municipal buildings, police and fire stations, emergency vehicles, snowplows. It goes a long way—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

TOURISM

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Tourism. Ontario's tourism industry employs more than a quarter of a million people and is a \$20-billion industry, yet we are continuing to face extraordinary challenges. Same-day car trips to Canada from the United States are in steep decline, according to Statistics Canada—to a record low this fall.

Early in the new year, the US passport requirement will start to take effect, meaning that all US visitors will soon need to obtain a passport before they visit Ontario, so that they can get home again hassle-free.

Most tourism partners know that without an effective and targeted marketing plan, Ontario's tourism jobs will be lost next year. The government has promised to introduce a new marketing campaign for tourism to encourage Ontario residents to holiday at home, yet there are still no details about this new campaign on the ministry's website. Just before Halloween, the minister promised tourism stakeholders that he would release the details of the campaign in the coming weeks. It's now Christmas. When will the minister release the details?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I can't find the answer in the book here, but I can speculate what it might be.

We are consulting at this time with the stakeholders to determine what would be best, but the member has identified, as we have, a significant concern out there. In my anecdotal explorations with the various stakeholders, they have said to me that one of the things that has been lacking is the kind of intensive advertising and marketing campaign within the province to encourage our own folks to explore all of the opportunities in areas such as yours.

You have some great assets in the Kitchener–Waterloo area. I've been there. There are really some nice places to explore everything in the province of Ontario, to identify what would be good in winter, summer, spring and fall, and to encourage our people to go from one end of the province to another, to look at another part of the province.

I think you will be very pleased with the advertising program that's going take place. I'm delighted that you have called for this kind of advertising, because we are going to deliver, I assure you.

Mr. Arnott: Back in June 2003, the member for St. Catharines, then in opposition, criticized the government for what he called “a virtual orgy of self-congratulatory, blatantly partisan advertising,” accusing the former government of “potentially cheating in an upcoming election.”

The McGuinty Liberal government has been condemned by Advertising Standards Canada for a health care advertising campaign that was inaccurate and omitted relevant information. The Auditor General has condemned the government for a year-end burn-off, where normal accountability and control provisions were reduced or eliminated.

Ontario Tourism needs a long-term commitment from this government for an effective and targeted marketing campaign that works, not a knee-jerk reaction at your end that is actually intended to boost the popularity of the Liberal government. What assurances will the minister provide the House that his marketing plan will be true, non-partisan, highlight the best of the whole province and actually give the tourism industry the boost it so urgently needs?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: First of all, I'm a bit confused by the member's thrust in this, because in the first case he says, “Would you please advertise to the people of Ontario and market to the people of Ontario to stay here?” And in the second, he gets into some other diversion issues.

I can tell you one thing: I've seen some ads on television already that are very intriguing. There's certainly enough there to interest the people of Ontario in staying in the province as much as possible to enjoy some of the attributes that we have. I can assure the member that when he sees the further marketing that goes on, he'll be delighted, because it will be portraying the various tourism assets that we have in a very positive fashion, so that he and I will be able to go to our neighbours and say, “Instead of perhaps looking at another jurisdiction to visit in this particular year, why don't you try the province of Ontario? Here are the various assets.” I think you'll be applauding those ads when you see them and saying, “That's just what Ontario needs.”

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you'll know that in the Timmins Daily Press yet again

today, there's another story: In this case, the community of Smooth Rock Falls has been told by Tembec that they're not prepared to turn over the power dams to the community so that community can use the power dams as a way of being able to entice or attract a replacement employer for the craft mill, or for any other economic activity.

You will know that those dams were specifically built back at the turn of the century—the previous century—in order to provide electricity at cost to those particular operations so that they're able to attract the investments to communities like Smooth Rock Falls, but more importantly keep the investments there by providing cheap electrical power in order to allow those craft mills and paper mills to operate.

My question simply is this, Minister: Will you intervene on behalf of the residents and the laid-off workers of Smooth Rock Falls and tell Tembec that the hydro dams are for the benefit of the community and not for the corporation of Tembec, and that the community will have control of those dams in the very end?

1500

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I thank the member for the question. This is another one of these hydro generation situations that have occurred with, in this case, the closing of the mill in Smooth Rock Falls. As the member knows, the company, Tembec in this case, owns the facility. They do have a water power lease agreement with the crown, and in the original lease agreements, it doesn't tie it to a pulp mill operation or to the community. It does talk about the purpose of generating power for the operation of machinery in a very general way. We are working with the company. The company being able to generate power here also in a way supports its other operations, and you have another big Tembec operation in Kapuskasing, in your riding. We want to make sure that that is sustainable, and obviously the revenue from this helps sustain that facility also.

Mr. Bisson: Minister, what's going to make Kapuskasing sustainable is having hydro rates that reflect the true cost of power, something that your government, quite frankly, in succession with the Ernie Eves government, has made worse.

The issue for Smooth Rock Falls, as it is for other communities, is very simple. They have (a) a power dam that has been built for the specific purpose of supplying energy to a corporation that would operate in their community; (b) they have woodchip directives when it comes to wood from other sawmills that should be tied to that community so that they can keep on operating, and a host of other tools that you have in your arsenal as the Minister of Natural Resources that you could use if you choose to support the community of Smooth Rock Falls, as well as many other communities.

So we're saying again, we want you to be our champion. We want you to be on our side. Are you prepared to stand up for the people of Smooth Rock Falls and say no to Tembec so that that power dam can stay with the

community, so it can attract a replacement employer or some other economic activity that will survive that community after Tembec is gone?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The McGuinty government is the champion for Smooth Rock Falls, and I must say, with my partner the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, we are working with the Smooth Rock Falls revitalization task force. We support that task force. I am looking for every opportunity I have in my ministry, and there are other under-utilized species. We've had RFPs out, and believe me, we are looking at those towns that are the hardest hit from the closures in the forestry industry for those new opportunities that are availing themselves in the northern forest. I would say that there should be some good news soon for Smooth Rock Falls. We're working closely with the community and we are dedicated to the survival of Smooth Rock Falls and northern Ontario.

HEALTHIER SCHOOLS STRATEGY

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is to the Minister of Education. I was pleased to hear that you and the Minister of Health Promotion made a healthy schools announcement at Market Lane Junior and Senior Public School in Toronto. The McGuinty government is clearly working hard to make sure our students are becoming more aware of how to live healthy lifestyles.

We know that research indicates that a healthy school environment supports student success. There's never been a government that has invested so much in our students when it comes to healthy initiatives, from forming our healthy schools working table, to our swimming-to-survive program, to our community-use-of-schools program. We take health and active living in this province very seriously. Minister, how's the McGuinty government making progress to improve students' health?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I want to thank the member for Peterborough for the question. Indeed, the connection between the health and well-being of our students and their academic achievement is very important to us, and we have already put a variety of initiatives in place. We have put in place nutrition standards for school boards for foods and beverages, we've put mandatory daily physical activity in place for our elementary students, we have protected students with anaphylaxis and we have a comprehensive strategy on bullying prevention.

The newest initiative, the healthy schools recognition program, does two things. It challenges all our elementary schools in the province to do one more thing to improve the health of their school. So they may plant a vegetable garden on school grounds, they may form an after-school running club, they may create a mural that outlines the anti-bullying strategy and confirms a bully-free zone. Those are all things that make the whole school a healthier, safer place. The final thing we're doing is allocating \$1,000 to the nearly 900 secondary

schools in the province to engage the students in activities that they think would make the most sense in terms of healthy schools at a secondary level.

Mr. Leal: Minister, it is clear that our government is on the side of Ontario students and teachers when it comes to developing healthy schools. The promotion of healthy living and active living is a best practice best started with our young people. Since we formed the government, we've taken remarkable steps to ensure that the tools and resources are available for teachers, parents and students to help our students enjoy the programs that lead to healthier and active lives. We've removed junk food from schools, instituted 20 minutes of daily physical activity and issued nutrition guidelines to all our boards. Minister, can you share with this House what further steps the McGuinty government is taking to promote health and well-being in our schools right across the province?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: To the Minister of Health Promotion.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to thank my colleague the Minister of Education. We did announce the healthy school recognition program in Toronto. I had the opportunity in my riding in the city of Nepean to announce the program at Frank Ryan school. This is a great school. It's like many schools in our province where they're offering, in this case, daily physical education, plus they have spinning classes that I took part in. They're trying to create a culture of wellness in the school system. What this school is doing: The school principal, the school council chair and the student council president have all signed a pledge, and that's available to every school in the province of Ontario. Their plan is to add an anti-bullying activity in their school, in order to get the banner which will be hung in their gymnasium as an opportunity for the government of Ontario to say thank you for the recognition—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): My question is for the Premier. Yesterday I wrote the Premier asking that he invoke subsection 44(2) of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act and return Bam Bam the deer to the Straby family in Greely.

What I'm asking, and over 10,000 residents in the city of Ottawa are requesting, is that you use the special powers provided under subsection 44(2) of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act to account for the special circumstances like the Strabys. Today the Straby family must drive 50 kilometres east of Ottawa to see this animal they have cared for, in a zoo that's not even open at this time of year, by paying an entrance fee at the gate. For their act of compassion, the Strabys may still be fined by MNR officials.

Will the minister or the Premier commit today to ensuring that the Strabys are not fined for their act of com-

passion? Further, will the Premier approve Mr. Straby's application, which he filed yesterday, to keep game wildlife in captivity for education, science and other purposes so that Bam Bam can go home?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I very much appreciate the member's co-operation on this issue and keeping me informed as this issue broke in September and in the following couple of weeks. That application that you've informed us of is before that, so we'll obviously give consideration to that application.

I would say to the member that wildlife, such as deer and other animals, belong to nature and they're not domesticated animals that we have domesticated historically that we keep as pets. We really have these laws in place to protect our natural heritage and our wildlife in Ontario. Right now, I just want to assure the member that Bam Bam is in a six-acre hardwood enclosure. Bam Bam has company of her own species now and is no longer alone. In January, we'll also have more deer, and they will start to have a life as a herd. Anyway, we'll just leave it at that. I appreciate the member's interest in this issue.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition, names gathered by the Fairview Mennonite Home in Cambridge, to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable long-term-care homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents need, with the dignity and respect that they deserve; and

"Whereas, even with a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

"Whereas the allowance for three meals is \$5.46 per day; and

"Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining, and there is a further concern with the residents' safety;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We, the undersigned, petition the McGuinty government to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, to allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

As I agree with the contents of the petition, I sign it also.

1510

RESPONSES TO PETITIONS

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): It's not a petition; it's a point of order. I tried to raise it before petitions started, but I do have a serious point of order.

On October 24 in this House, I presented a petition addressed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the government concerning a public inquiry in the city of Vaughan. This is sessional day 29, five days beyond what the government has to answer this. They have not seen fit to answer it and I am requesting a response to that petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Minister, I want to remind you that you're required, under standing order 38(i), to file a response to the petition within 24 sitting days of its presentation. Your response is now overdue. I'd ask that you give the House some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): It will be forthcoming shortly. But I should tell you that in the meantime, I've had a meeting with both the mayor and the member opposite about precisely that issue, and he's well aware—

The Speaker: Thank you. Petitions?

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have a petition on the granting of Ombudsman oversight of children's aid societies. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

"Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

"Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS)."

I agree with the petition, affix my signature thereon and send it to the table by Sarah.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the national child benefit supplement was created to reduce the depth of poverty across Canada for low-income families earning less than \$35,000;

"Whereas the government of Ontario claws back the supplement from families receiving income from Ontario Works or the Ontario disability support plan; ...

"Whereas the government of Ontario has failed to end the clawback for those families on OW or ODSP;

"We, the undersigned from CFUW Ontario Council, petition the Legislative Assembly to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement."

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Lung Association's women and COPD national report card 2006 reveals that more than 425,000 Canadian women have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and more than 4,300 will die of the disease this year; and

"Whereas the women and COPD national report indicates that since 2000, female mortality due to COPD has risen at double the rate of breast cancer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a call to action for early diagnosis and optimized management of COPD to reduce illness and suffering; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the Ontario Lung Association's COPD advisory panel report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on the prevention and management of COPD in Ontario; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario endorse a comprehensive strategy to address COPD in this province."

I'm pleased to sign this and Arianne will deliver it to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been sent to me by members of SEIU. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

"Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario

government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

"Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

"Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

"Whereas a coroner's jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day."

I agree with the petitioners and affix my signature to this.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to present on behalf of my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most people and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

This is signed by more than 100 people. I thank the people from Niagara Falls on behalf of my seatmate and I will ask page Kelsea to carry it for me.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the parents of St. Paul's elementary school in Alliston have raised many issues regarding the security, cleanliness and state of repair of their school; and

"Whereas a 2003 condition assessment completed by the Ontario government identified the need for \$1.8 million in repairs to St. Paul's elementary school; and

"Whereas the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board has approached the Ministry of Education with the intention of having the school deemed prohibitive to repair as they believe the school requires \$2.28 million in repairs, or 84% of the school replacement cost; and

"Whereas there are ongoing concerns with air quality, heating and ventilation, electrical, plumbing, lack of air conditioning and the overall structure of the building, including cracks from floor to ceiling, to name a few;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Education immediately deem St. Paul's elementary school prohibitive to repair, secure immediate funding and begin construction of a new facility so that the children of St. Paul's can be educated in a facility that is secure and offers them the respect and dignity that they deserve."

I went to this school from kindergarten to grade 8 and my mother taught there for 33 years. It does need to be replaced.

REFUNDABLE CONTAINERS

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This petition came in rather late, but I will read it into the record because I was requested to do so. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and the Minister of the Environment specifically.

"Whereas we find lots of pop cans and beer bottles in our parks plus children's playgrounds;

"Whereas it is therefore unsafe for our children to play in these parks and playgrounds;

"Whereas many of these bottles and cans are broken and mangled, therefore causing harm and danger to our children;

"Whereas Ontarians are dumping about a billion aluminium cans worth \$27 million into landfill every year instead of recycling them;

"Whereas the undersigned want to see legislation passed to have deposits paid on cans and bottles, which would be returnable and therefore not found littering our parks and streets;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly urge and demand that the Ontario government institute a collection program that will include all pop drinks, Tetra Pak juices and can containers to be refundable in order to reduce littering and protect our environment."

Since I am in favour of this petition, I am delighted to sign it. Thank you very much.

1520

ORPHANED DEER

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): I am pleased to support a petition that 9,500 residents of the city of Ottawa have given me.

"Whereas the Straby family of Greely, Ontario, showed enormous compassion by rescuing Bam Bam the deer from the side of a road when it was only a fawn; and

"Whereas the Straby family has cared for Bam Bam for more than two years by providing food, shelter and love; and

"Whereas representatives of the MNR confiscated Bam Bam and placed her in a distant zoo east of Ottawa; and

"Whereas section 44(2) of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act gives the Minister of Natural Resources authority to license the Straby family to care for Bam Bam; and

"We, the undersigned, call on the Parliament of Ontario to return Bam Bam the deer to the care of the Straby family of Greely, Ontario, no later than December 25, 2006."

I affix my signature.

ADULT LITERACY

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): I have another petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas investing in adult literacy initiatives will give more Ontarians the opportunity to upgrade their skills and gain the training they need to reach their full potential; and

"Whereas through these funding initiatives, Ontarians will have greater accessibility to post-secondary education and valuable apprenticeship programs that will put them on the right track at gaining the jobs in their field of choice; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government is providing new support for adult literacy by expanding academic upgrading services to help workers build stronger literacy and numeracy skills so they are able to perform at a higher level, thereby enhancing our workforce and our economy; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government is investing \$6.2 billion more into post-secondary education and training by 2009-10;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the McGuinty government's efforts in providing funding to adult literacy initiatives in order to both help Ontarians to meet their full potential as well as to strengthen Ontario's economy."

I do concur, and I will affix my signature to it.

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I've received more petitions from the people of the Port Sydney area regarding Mary Lake dam. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway, where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government

programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

LAKEVIEW GENERATING STATION

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas there should be no decisions on the future development of the Lakeview generating station grounds until a full, independent environmental assessment, including air, water, soil samples and a health study of long-term residents, is completed to determine the historical, current and accumulative impact of industrial pollutants on the existing environment of Lakeview, southeast Mississauga, and its citizens; and

"Government includes this assessment and gives its findings equal weight in all mandatory environmental reports regarding future development of the Lakeview generating grounds."

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS

EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 18, 2006, on the motion for second reading of Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act / Projet de loi 173, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés et la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I am told that when the House last debated Bill 173, the member for Nickel Belt gave her presentation and concluded her time. We now go to questions and comments related to the speech given by the member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I very much appreciated the contribution of the member for Nickel Belt to this debate. What's remarkable is that this bill, co-sponsored by Dalton McGuinty and John Tory—oh, and

let's understand that John Tory is now Preston Manning in Stornoway.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the member for Niagara Centre to please refer to other members of the House by the name of their riding or by their ministerial title.

Mr. Kormos: Of course, Speaker.

Dalton McGuinty, the leader of the Liberal Party and the Premier of Ontario, and John Tory, the leader of the Conservative Party and the member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey—for at least the next several months—understand that the deal that these two cooked up in the backroom was exposed by Ms. Martel, the member for Nickel Belt, in the course of her comments around Bill 173. It isn't just a paucity of debate, it's a desperate lack and failure to debate by the Conservatives and the Liberals that makes this second reading truly remarkable.

Oh, the courage they have out in front of the cameras, insisting that this is good policy. Good policy? Well, if it's good policy, stand up and explain to your constituents why you're supporting it. If it's good policy, then make sure that the bill undergoes scrutiny in public committee hearings, because I can tell you this: New Democrats will make sure that this bill is forced into committee. New Democrats can guarantee that to you. We are going to make sure that this bill is forced into committee. The question that then remains is, will this government use the brute force of its majority to as readily force it out?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I had the opportunity yesterday to hear a number of the speeches, including the member from Nickel Belt. As usual, she speaks with a great degree of passion and expertise in regards to those in our community who have needs and are vulnerable. I look forward to the balance of the debate on this particular bill.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I know that the member from Nickel Belt spoke the other day on this bill. In her address, she certainly raised the issue of ending the clawback of the national child benefit. I know she has raised that issue on numerous occasions in questions of the government, and she used her time on this debate to do so again. I know that's an issue about which she is very passionate.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I want to commend my colleague the member from Nickel Belt for yet again raising issues that I think are really important to the people in our constituencies, specifically, the battle that has been ongoing now for I don't know how many years in regards to getting justice for kids with autism and their parents. The member from Nickel Belt has championed for two Parliaments now the need to get the province to provide autism services for kids past age six. I've seen, as all of us in this Legislature have seen, what it means to the parents, the siblings and the children themselves when it comes to not having IBI treatment for kids past age six. I think the member makes a good point. It would cost us not a heck of a lot to be able to assist those children and those families, to provide those

services necessary, as compared to what we will receive by way of an increase. I don't bemoan members working hard and all of those things, but the question is that we also have to assist other people in our society. She asks the question on IBI, which I think is a good one.

The second one is that of long-term care. As she has, and as with everybody else in this Legislature, I have had an opportunity to visit long-term-care facilities this fall, as they have invited us in to talk about some of the commitments the Liberals made in the last election and, since becoming the provincial government, have not maintained. They said specifically that they wanted to provide an extra \$6,000 per year of funding over when being elected to government. We're not anywhere near that amount of money. Long-term-care facilities are having to struggle to provide the kinds of services we need in dietary, housekeeping and personal care in our long-term-care facilities. I think of the Extendicare facilities in Kapuskasing and Timmins. I think of the Golden Manor, North Centennial Manor, Foyer des Pionniers and many others across this province that are struggling to provide the services necessary to keep seniors in the long-term-care facilities with a service level that they should expect. I think the member makes a good point when she says that if we're going to help ourselves, we should first help those people who need help as well.

1530

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments, there having been four. I'll return to the member for Nickel Belt who has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I want to thank the members who made a contribution. I want to say—I have already made it clear and I'm pleased to do so again today—that in the very fine tradition of Tommy Douglas and Stanley Knowles, I will be giving this pay raise to local organizations that primarily serve children and youth in our community.

I spoke with the executive director of the Social Planning Council of Sudbury this morning, Janet Gasparini, and I said I'd be seeking the advice of the council on how best to distribute funds in the community. She was very excited about my request and said that the council will be very pleased to help me with this project.

I've also advised the local media today that I would be happy to make available to the public all of my charitable tax receipts to show that the only people who benefited were the local charities and not myself. I fully intend to do that.

I find it incredible that any Liberal member would be so vehemently opposed to my making these contributions to local groups in my community that help children. I find it incredible that you are opposed to this. And it begs the question why you are so very opposed to my doing this to help the very organizations that you don't seem to want to help. So shame on you, all of you who have a problem with my using my pay raise in this way.

The other point I want to make is about this whole process. Before December 13, there was nothing on the

agenda about a pay raise. Two representatives from this government—the Minister of Finance and the government House leader—were very public in that regard. Then bang, last week, here comes a pay raise bill and a special motion for us to sit longer to get it through. There will be no public hearings. We are doing this “in the dark of night” before Christmas, so the public won’t have a chance to respond. That is a terrible way to do business.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I had thought the member for Ottawa–Carleton was going to be speaking, as she certainly got up out of her chair. So I apologize for waiting, thinking that that’s what was happening there.

Nonetheless, it’s my pleasure to put on the record a few comments about Bill 173. I have to say that I’ve received a number of e-mails, telephone calls and letters from people in my constituency and outside of my constituency, as I’m sure other members of the Legislature have. When I summarize what people are saying and what they are concerned about, the issues fall into two general areas: One is concern about the process and timing, if you want to call it that, and second, about the amount of the increase that is contained in Bill 173. I’m going to focus a little bit on those issues, but I also want to talk a little bit about some of the things that I think we could have been spending this extra time on when we’re here in the Legislature.

It’s interesting, because this is, I think, my third time getting to this point, where we’re about to leave for the holiday break and inevitably something or other comes up and we end up staying till the very last possible day, which, again, is not necessarily problematic. It’s certainly been an interesting experience in terms of watching the toing and froing that goes on amongst House leaders, particularly when talking about which bills are going to be coming forward and which ones are not. It’s quite an interesting process.

From my perspective, there are things that I think are more of a priority, and I’ll be reflecting on those a little bit later on, nearer to the end of my speech. Some of them are in fact government initiatives, some are private members’ initiatives and some are just issues that are out there festering in communities that need to be addressed.

I think it’s interesting to note that of the responses that have come across my desk in the last week, or less than a week, I guess, a number of people surprisingly are of the opinion that maybe there is justification for some kind of adjustment in the salary or the pay of MPPs. I was surprised to see that. A number of people who are writing to me, who are sending me e-mails and letters, are saying that. Maybe it’s not totally unjustifiable that there be some kind of increase. But then, of course, as you read into the letter, they begin to reflect on the reality that many of them are experiencing as either low-paid workers or as workers whose increases are more akin to inflation or more reflective of the general economy, whereas the one in Bill 173, as we all know, bears no resemblance at all to those kinds of measures.

Interestingly enough, the other thing that comes up often is that many people say in those letters that the idea of a huge adjustment in one fell swoop is another thing that is distasteful. So even if they buy the fact that there needs to be an adjustment, which some do—many don’t, but some do—the next thing they say is, “But it just is distasteful to people that that one fell swoop right before Christmas is the way that it was done.” Again, it goes back to people being concerned about the process by which this was brought forward so quickly, so unexpectedly, and the timing being right before the holiday season.

I think, really, had the government taken the time to think about how to make adjustments that they considered to be necessary in Bill 173, and perhaps phased in or in some other way addressed those increases in a way that people in communities, people in ridings across this province could support, we certainly wouldn’t be here. I’d actually be finishing off my Christmas shopping, which desperately needs to be done, as opposed to being here debating this. Although I have to say, I could certainly be here debating many, many other issues. Again, I’ll be raising some of those in a very short time.

I thought it was instructive, actually—and I’m going to take the opportunity to look at some of the issues that have been raised in my own newspaper. I have not only the e-mails and the letters and the volumes of things that have been sent to me, but I also have a number of clippings from the newspaper. I’m going to refrain, for the most part, from reading into the record any of the individual letters to the editor that have been published in the *Hamilton Spectator*. There have been many and they’re pretty consistent in terms of being upset with the government, not only for the amount of the raise but for the process and the way it was brought forward in such a quick and unexpected fashion at this point in time.

My initial reaction to this whole issue, coming from a council—and I know many members here are saying that their big issue is that, as MPPs, they are paid less than what many of their counterparts on municipal councils are. Today in the *Hamilton Spectator* there was an article that talked about that very issue. It outlines the amount of salary that Hamilton city councillors receive; in fact that’s the amount of salary I was receiving, adjusted down, because they get a cost-of-living increase every year. Their salary in 2000, the year of amalgamation, was set at \$50,000 and it compounds with a small inflation-based adjustment indexation every year. So at this point in time, the members of city council are at \$55,855 annually. Granted, about a third of that is a tax-free allowance, so I would suggest that they’re somewhere around \$75,000.

We all know that although we call it a pay of \$88,000, more or less, in this place, the vast majority of members are at around \$95,000; in fact, I think there are very few who are at less than \$95,000, maybe one or two out of all one hundred and—how many do we have here now? I guess maybe 100 because there are by-elections on the way. The point is that although I hear that argument, it’s

certainly not something that is reflective of my own experience.

Having said that, people will recall that I came to this place in a by-election, so I hadn't been jumping, as people tend to characterize it when a person moves from one level of government to the other. I saw an opportunity and was given the opportunity to represent my party in a by-election, and saw the quite likely possibility of bringing party status back to our caucus, which we all now know is historic and something that did occur.

1540

The perspective that I came from was more about achieving that goal than anything to do with salary, and as you can see from the information that I just provided around our city council, where I was coming from, and the salary that they receive, there was a significant increase between where I was then and where I am now. I was quoted in the *Hamilton Spectator* as saying something to the effect of, "I don't think I have anything to complain about."

I did have this conversation with the Integrity Commissioner when he was preparing his report—and I know that members opposite, the members of the McGuinty Liberal government, are heckling our members on this side about a number of issues, particularly when the Harris government, the previous Conservative government, decided to do away with the pension plan for members. One of the things I spoke to the Integrity Commissioner about at the time when he was talking about our annual filing statements and the possibility of making recommendations to the government about increases to salary, my biggest concern—and I raised it with him—was the issue of nixing or getting rid of our defined benefit pension plan here in the province of Ontario as MPPs. Again, I'm quoted in our newspaper as raising that issue, not particularly from the perspective of having a gold-plated pension plan.

Interestingly enough, notwithstanding the fact that there isn't a defined benefit plan at this point—and even this bill, Bill 173, was a huge missed opportunity, from my perspective—I would have been much happier had the McGuinty Liberal government actually dealt with the fact that the defined benefit pension plan was sent the way of the dodo bird. I would have preferred that we had dealt with the defined benefit pension plan here at the Legislature, because I believe it is the only way to make sure that people are able to retire with a modicum of dignity and quality of life. Otherwise, the amount of dollars that people have an opportunity to set aside oftentimes is left to the whim of the markets, and one or two errors in investment or significant activities in the marketplace that reduce your holdings can cause you significant pain when it comes to retirement.

I don't believe a gold-plated pension plan was necessary, but simply a defined benefit pension plan would have been appreciated. I have to say, if there's one thing in the city of Hamilton that I do miss and that I do feel I missed out on is that when I was a municipal councillor, I was a member of the OMERS pension plan, so I had an

opportunity to participate in a defined benefit pension plan as a municipal councillor. My municipal colleagues, the newly elected ones as well as the ones who have been there for quite some time, are currently members of the OMERS pension plan. So I really do wish that the government had taken seriously the idea of reinstating not a gold-plated but just a defined benefit pension plan overall for the members of the Legislature, because we do provide important services and we do work hard. I would say that every member of this Legislature works hard, but what we often do is interrupt our work life. We are working somewhere, we get into elected politics, and everything we have done in our life prior to getting into elected politics goes by the wayside. "Usually in the middle of your best earning years" is the way the Integrity Commissioner described it when he and I were having the conversation. Your best earning years are put into this place, where there's no guarantee that at the end of the day you'll end up with a pension of any kind.

Having said that, certainly there is no guarantee that any worker in the province of Ontario retires with a decent pension, and that's why I believe there needs to be significant review of the Ontario Pension Benefits Act. I've done some consultation on that issue myself around the province. Unfortunately, the Minister of Finance, who has finally decided, at the 11th hour of their mandate, to set up a task force to look at Ontario's pension system, has not bothered to include in the mandate of those very well respected and wise people on that task force the whole issue of coverage for pension plans generally. In fact, they're not even looking at the fact that the vast majority of workers in this province are not covered by pension plans and what that means as a public policy issue. I think it's shameful that a task force is in place to deal with some significant issues around pensions and not deal with the single most important one, which is that most Ontario workers don't get one, and that's problematic.

I wanted to quote from the *Spectator* editorial that came out after Bill 173 came forward. I want to read it out loud because I think in many ways it reflects some of the shock and disbelief initially, and it then goes on to say what the government might have wanted to consider if they were going to bring something like this forward and perhaps even bother to keep people onside. This is Howard Elliott, the editor of the *Spectator*. It says:

"McGuinty, and the provincial Conservatives who also support this idea," the idea of the raise, "aren't completely off base but their execution stinks."

"Yes, there is a legitimate problem with the lack of parity between MPPs and MPs, who earn a basic \$147,700 compared to MPPs' \$88,771. Even some municipal politicians earn more." Remember, this is the *Spectator*.

"Yes, there is something wrong when a backbench MP, such as McGuinty's brother, earns more than Ontario's Minister of Health."

"But does that legitimate problem justify a raise of this size, sprung on the Legislature and electorate in this way?"

"Unequivocally, no."

"The government could have done this in a number of ways.

"When the Auditor General reported that MPPs need to earn more or be seen as a farm team for the feds"—I think he meant the Integrity Commissioner at that point, but anyway—"the Premier could have acknowledged the problem and struck an independent team to review and make recommendations within a month or so.

"Or the government could have introduced a bill that proposed a much more modest increase, say 8%, with another sizable portion phased in next year.

"Or it could have pledged to make this an election issue and run on the higher pay, with raises to be implemented after the next election late next year.

"Any of these, or a host of other options we can think of, would have made more sense and been more defensible than this option" that they chose to implement.

"The sad irony is that most reasonable people would agree that an elected representative should be compensated fairly and in keeping with a competitive market.

"Otherwise, qualified and gifted people will be discouraged from entering the public arena because the financial sacrifice is just too great.

"No one is asking politicians to take a vow of poverty, merely that they work and act in ways that assure taxpayers that we aren't getting fleeced.

"This decision is so deeply flawed that even fair-minded people must be forgiven for overlooking reasonable substance and seeing only clumsy and badly executed style and strategy."

Again, that's from the editorial in the *Spectator*. Although I agree with some of what they say, there are other pieces that I don't think are strong enough in terms of the way they look at the issue.

I wanted to put on the record a couple of things that I thought were more important for us to be dealing with at the 11th hour prior to the holidays. I'm looking on my desk for another opinion column that was in the *Hamilton Spectator*, and that was by Andrew Dreschel, who is a much-read opinion columnist in the *Hamilton Spectator*. His comments were a lot more pointed when it came to this particular move by the McGuinty Liberals, but nonetheless, he comes down on the side of saying that he doesn't believe that the idea of increased pay really makes any difference, that, regardless of what the pay is, you get different-quality representatives, and that's what the democratic process brings us to. I wish I could find it because his remarks were actually quite funny.

If we were here right before the Christmas holidays, the holiday break, and we were talking about increases that need to happen to the Ontario disability support plan, if we were talking about possible increases to the minimum wage so that the lowest-paid workers in our communities are able to have a decent standard of living, not this time of year but all year around, then I would feel a lot better about spending this week debating bills. If we were talking about the government finally making good on its promise to stop the clawback of the national child benefit, I'd be happy to talk about that in this time frame,

or if we were talking about changing the special diet forms so that people like myself and my colleague the member for Beaches–East York don't have to bring really sad and incredibly disgusting stories of hardship that people are going through because they can't get their special diet.

1550

Members may recall that I brought forward the issue of Mr. Goodwin, a person living in my riding who was unable to purchase his Ensure, which is a diet supplement. As a result of an illness he has called ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease, he needs to have four cans of Ensure a day. Why? Because he can't chew and swallow food because the muscles in his neck and his esophagus don't allow—it's a degenerative disease whereby you begin to lose control of your muscles, particularly your involuntary system, so what happens is, eventually you can no longer eat. Mr. Goodwin used to have four cans of Ensure paid for through his special diet allowance. The government brings in the new form, and lo and behold, there's nothing on there to indicate how many cans of Ensure are allowed for special diet. Hence, he gets cut off to almost nil for special diet. Luckily, when I brought this issue forward—Mr. Goodwin made an issue out of it locally in our local media—the government relented and made some changes so that ALS sufferers are able to obtain the required amount of nutritional supplement for their particular illness.

Likewise, my friend from Beaches–East York brought up the situation of Brian Woods. His issue has been brought here for months and months and months. He has not had the same luck that Mr. Goodwin had because the government is still ignoring his pleas. Meanwhile, the diabetes, at the time it was first brought here, was only—"only," I say, and that's pretty scary—creating sores and eventually holes in his feet. Now, this very day, he watches the legislative channel from his hospital bed awaiting a double amputation of his legs because he's not obtaining nutritional food appropriate to a person with diabetes. That is something that I would rather be talking about here in this Legislature today.

Talking about all the job losses in the manufacturing sector in Ontario, some 140,000 jobs—I'd like to be talking about a jobs commissioner, somebody who can help us with those job losses. I'd like to be talking about a government bill on the independence of the child advocate. That's something that I think would be worth our while. Indexing WSIB: That would be something that would be worth our while.

Unfortunately, the time has run out. I thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I'll just ask a quick question of the member. I wonder if she's going to opt out and not take any of the money at all or if she's going to take the charity portion and then get the tax receipt.

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): In the short time I have—I watched the House yesterday; I

couldn't come. I just want to thank Norm Sterling for putting our view forward so eloquently, as Norm does. I certainly appreciate that.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I want to speak to the comments of my colleague, who I think has addressed well the issues that are before us. What are the priorities of this government and what, in fact, should be the priorities in terms of dealing with compensation for MPPs? There's no question that there are many, many pressing issues that face us in this province: the question of the special diet for people on social assistance; the question of rates for those on WSIB; the question of legislation that has come before this House around minimum wage, around the Bob Shaw law to protect firefighters who, through no fault of their own, because they are fulfilling their duties, are struck down early in life with cancer. Those pieces of legislation, those issues, should be the high-priority issues that this House is seized with. Instead, right now we are seized with this issue.

The member is quite correct when she says that addressing the issue of pensions is an entirely reasonable one, not just for members of the this House, of course, but for people throughout this society for whom the question of income in their old age is an extraordinarily profound and central issue that I come across regularly when I talk to the seniors in seniors' housing in my riding. I think all people deserve a decent pension. I think the government would have been in very good shape if it had come forward with a bill that had incorporated pension reform for MPPs and a small amount of catch-up increase, but instead the government went, I think, completely wild in bringing forward this bill at a time when in fact a great part of the population is tuned out from these issues. A great part of the population is caught up with other things of far greater moment to them right now.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I find, as Lewis Carroll said in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, this debate is getting "curiouser and curiouser."

If I remember correctly, the member for Nickel Belt's current position is that I am supposed to vote for this bill so that she has the luxury of voting against the bill, so that she can then turn around, vote against the bill but take the money to give to charity. So I think her position is that I'm supposed to vote for the bill so she can give money to charity in her riding. Is that correct?

The Acting Speaker: There have been four questions and comments. That concludes the time for questions and comments.

I return to the member from Hamilton East, who has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Horwath: I want to thank the members who have made a few remarks on my speech, and even those who didn't make a remark on my speech but made other remarks. I think it's appropriate that people take the time to get on the record on the issue.

It's interesting, because one of the issues that was raised by my friend from Toronto–Danforth was the issue

of Bill 111, which is the one that basically allows for presumptive legislation to be put in place in Ontario so that firefighters and their grieving families don't have to fight the WSIB. And I say "grieving," because many times these men and women have long past gone through the stage of actually being diagnosed with cancer. In fact, they have deteriorated through a horrible bout with cancer and have passed away, and sometimes have been dead and buried for 10 years before the WSIB finally approves their claims. Jeez, if we were waiting that long for a pay increase, we'd be in real trouble around here.

Mr. Kormos: And we're not. That's the whole point.

Ms. Horwath: And we certainly are not.

I'm glad he raised that, because that's one of the issues that I think can be resolved fairly quickly. In fact, had that bill been brought forward in this kind of process, to get through by the end of the year, we would have made many a firefighter and firefighter's family happy. The fire chiefs of Ontario and volunteer and professional firefighters support this bill. Many municipalities support Bill 111. So that's another one that I think we would have been able to spend time on. It would have been quite appropriate.

Instead, we're here talking about a bill that, frankly, has caused no end of angst in the population of Ontario. People are not happy with the way the government has brought this forward, and really it's sad, because there were probably many other options before the government that would not have caused such a melee of concern in our communities.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. I recognize the member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Last Saturday, my daughter Marnie, who is married to Ben Lines, had a lovely eight-pound, one-ounce baby boy in Sevenoaks, England. The baby's name is Peter John Lines.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: No, I just wanted to be able to send them a copy of Hansard when I visit them in January.

But secondarily, my son Erin and his wife Rebecca had a little baby as well on July 28, 2006, and her name is Mollie Barbara Ann O'Toole. She was seven pounds, 15 ounces.

It's so important at this time of year to share that with members of the House—a lighter matter on an important topic day like Bill 173. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1600

The Acting Speaker: I don't believe that's a point of order, technically speaking, but we are delighted to hear the news and wish to offer our congratulations to your family.

Further debate? I recognize the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Tabuns: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address this issue today.

There's a lot of concern in the wider community about this bill. I hear about it in cabs, I hear about it in e-mails, I talk to people on the street about it. I want to talk to you

about the way this bill has been handled, about its substance and where it fits into the priorities of this government, because frankly, timing and time are key elements in understanding what governments do, what's important to them and how they treat the public.

I first want to speak to this whole question of timing. My colleague from Hamilton mentioned this as well, but I want to go back to it. If you issue a press release late in the afternoon of a long weekend in midsummer, you have done your best to ensure that that press release does not reach the eyes of readers. You have effectively shunted it aside. It's an indication either of very low importance or of a desire to ensure that as few people as possible hear about that.

Frankly, to bring this bill forward in the week before Christmas, when people are focused on other things, when there are a variety of religious holidays—Hanukkah—when there are a variety of social commitments and demands on people so that politics is way down on their list of concerns and interests, speaks about this government's respect, or lack of it, for the public—introducing a bill that is of great moment to many. In the timing of the bill, on its own, this government is showing a lack of respect for legislators and for the people of Ontario. I think that's a significant problem in and of itself.

I want to talk about time, time being in some ways coin of the realm in legislation. Prior to being in this Legislature, I had an opportunity for a number of years to be a city councillor with the city of Toronto, which is where I found the value of time in legislation: that the ability to set agendas, to put things at a particular point in time, has huge bearing on outcome and spoke profoundly to the priorities, or lack of priorities, of the Legislature, of the people engaged in the process. So I know that legislative time is extraordinarily precious and limited. If you look back over Hansard, we'll have debates twice a day for a few hours on, say, two different bills. Most commonly, that's most of what happens. We're not talking three or four bills a day, five or six bills a day. It is a very slow process, and so the hours devoted to legislation in a Legislature are extraordinarily narrow and limited, and their use speaks to what's important to the legislative agenda of the government.

I have seen, in my time, initiatives taken and sent into orbit, referred back to a committee that meets very rarely, tabled, received and in many other ways simply put out, way out there, so they never come back to land. I have seen items held back on an agenda so that they don't ever quite make it to discussion, they don't make it to a vote. So that setting of the agenda, that setting of the time is as powerful as having a majority in any Legislature. Your ability to determine whether something will come to a vote, where it sits on an agenda, whether in fact it ever will be debated: Those are profound powers, and their use speaks to what's important to a government.

I would say that my colleague from Hamilton has spoken well about this and spoken about what the priorities are of this government. In fact, bringing this bill forward, the one that's on the floor right now, was a very

bold move on the part of the government. It showed a desire to get something through, to get it through quickly. As I said just a few minutes ago, I think it showed a lack of respect, but it was a bold move to substantially change things, and it showed that the time for this initiative was of value to the government. It was willing to spend time. It was willing to spend a day, two days, three days, a week; maybe more. So I would say that this bill ranks very high in the government's roster of priorities. What I have to ask, though, what I have to observe, is that there are other priorities that one would think would be at least as high. My colleague from Parkdale-High Park, Cheri DiNovo, earlier this year introduced a member's bill to increase the minimum wage to \$10 per hour.

Let's look at the difference in treatment between those two initiatives. Ms. DiNovo, as a member of the third party, brought something forward as a private member's bill. It had an opportunity for debate one Thursday morning. That is a bill that is not now scheduled to go to committee. That is a bill to which the government has not made a commitment of support. Its chances of getting to third reading rest on the ability of those who need that pay increase to apply pressure to the government. That was not the case with regard to this bill. So one has to say, what was the importance of the \$10 minimum wage bill as opposed to the bill before us?

Ms. DiNovo, when she spoke in the House about the \$10 minimum wage, quoted Dr. Charles Hastings, who was the city of Toronto's first medical officer of health. He said, back in the beginning of the 20th century, that "every nation that endorses a wage that does not afford sufficient revenue for the home, a revenue that will make possible development of a sound mind and body, is trampling on a primary principle of democracy."

UNESCO, the United Nations committee on social, economic and cultural rights, condemned our minimum wage in Ontario as "insufficient to enable workers and their families to enjoy a decent standard of living."

I'd say that that would identify this as an area that should be a priority for government, an area where government should act to ensure that those who flip burgers and who stock shelves at Wal-Mart have enough money at the end of the day to clothe themselves, to clothe their children, to put food in the cupboard and on the table. But that bill is not a priority. It did not get bold action on the part of the government. It may or may not touch down, again depending on the pressure that's applied.

In my riding, poverty and the related issues of crime, drug addiction, and both mental and physical illness are substantial issues. In the north part of my riding last summer, two people were shot within two weeks at one intersection. Two people were shot in a club on the Danforth subsequent to that. In the south end of my riding, we have ongoing problems with drug addiction, with crack houses. I know, because I meet with community groups and I meet with my constituents, I meet with people in the neighbourhood, that we can try and address these problems in a variety of ways. We can

bring in medical programs; we can try and provide counselling to people who have addictions; we can press our local police forces to try and be more vigilant to apply more officers to immediate situations. But I also know, in the end, that without addressing the fundamental problems around poverty, deprivation, child abuse, these other problems will not be resolved. And I have to say, my constituents see them as pressing problems. In fact, I would say that anyone in this House who deals with those problems in their ridings would see them as pressing problems.

So I ask again, what is it about taking action to start to deal with poverty, to start this whole process of bringing in a minimum wage? Why is it ranked so much lower in the priority list of this government? Why does it not get the bold action that it requires?

I had an opportunity, a few weeks ago at the end of November, to introduce the Community Right to Know Act, which is modelled on legislation that's in place in California, to give people warning if they are to buy a product or a service that will expose them to carcinogens. Frankly, it's a useful act. It's not a great, world-changing act, but part of a larger puzzle that can reduce the incidence of cancer, reduce the incidence of heavy metal poisoning, contribute to the power that people need to protect their own health, and contribute to the society as a whole to protect the health of all its members.

1610

It was interesting to me to go through the debate afterwards. I didn't have enough time to actually address all of the questions or comments that were raised by those in the House, but I could summarize the comments of government members who said things along the lines of, "Doing an approach like that in Ontario is too narrow. We need a pan-Canadian approach. Environment Canada and Health Canada are taking action. This bill is too limited. We need to go beyond it. It will set up a patchwork of standards." And so in the end, although the bill passed second reading—there were no votes in opposition—it did not rate the same priority as this bill before us to increase the pay of members here in this Legislature.

It was interesting. When I heard all those comments, it took me back to the 1990s, when we were engaged in the fight around second-hand smoke. I heard all of these arguments from those on Toronto city council who were opposed to taking action. But if we hadn't in Toronto, in East York, in North York and in other municipalities across Ontario taken action, we would not be where we are today, with far more robust strategies to take on second-hand smoke and protect the population. Those sorts of things take prioritization; they need the commitment of government; they need allocation of time. And allocation of time on the exposure-to-chemicals issue, we're not getting. We are seeing what the priority of the government is. The priority of the government is to get through this bill.

The government could have negotiated with all parties in the chamber. They could have come up with a package

that I think would have been acceptable to all. But it was not their nature; it was not their predisposition. And so they decided they were willing to spend a lot of time on this rather than spending time on issues that I think are far more pressing to the majority of people who live in this society.

Bill 111, the Bob Shaw act that my colleague Andrea Horwath from Hamilton put forward: I had an opportunity this fall to speak with firefighters here in Toronto and to hear that, in fact, the use of breathing apparatus was not enough to protect people from exposure to toxic chemicals, that when firefighters go into fires, many of the toxic chemicals that they are exposed to can be absorbed through the skin. They don't need to be—I guess the word might be "negligent." They don't need to be negligent and forget to have their breathing apparatus on to be exposed to toxic chemicals. They are exposed because of the ability of those chemicals to get through their skin. So one would say that it's pretty clear we have people who risk their lives, who are out there dealing with an environment in which construction materials contain toxic elements. They deal with fires in waste dumps. They deal with fires in recycling facilities where toxic materials are present. They, unfortunately, contract cancer at very high rates. Why is there difficulty in getting through the private member's bill, Bill 111, the Bob Shaw act? Why is that not a priority? Why is time not allocated? Why is that act not before us today as one that could be brought through, addressed—and justly addressed—and one that I would say the majority of people in this society, in this community and in this province would support?

Bill 30, an act to reduce needle-stick injuries: The member for Nickel Belt has brought forward an act to protect front-line health care workers. We know there are a lot of nasty diseases out there that people have to deal with: hepatitis, AIDS. A needle stick can have profound consequences for a person's life. It makes sense, given everything that we would say around this chamber about the value of the lives of front-line health care workers, that the bill put forward by the member would be debated, put through committee, adopted and put in place to protect people's health. That's a high priority and would be seen by people in this society as a high priority. The bill before us is not seen as a priority, and that's part of the reason it's being brought through at this time when so many people in this province are distracted.

There are other issues that cry out for bold and quick action: the whole question of support for autistic children and their families. I have constituents in my riding trying to deal with this problem. They want care for their child so that the child has a good chance of growing up and being a functional person, being able to live a full life. They know that to do that they have to get treatment early on and treatment has to be consistent. Why is that not a priority for this government? Why is it not high on its list of actions that have to be taken? Why is it set aside? Remember, the allocation of time says to everyone what's important to a government and what is not

important to a government, and it's very clear that this question, the question of dealing with autism, is not an important issue for this government.

The whole question of dealing with firefighters and their contraction of cancer: not a concern; protection of the public through community right to know: low priority; \$10 minimum wage: not a priority. One has to ask where this government is going when it sets aside a lot of the big questions of the day and focuses instead on this bill. I think if you look back over the last three years, if you look back at the promises that were made in the last provincial election, this is about a government that is at its core a government that likes to market, likes to put forward image, has difficulty biting through on substance and, when it comes to the issues that are so key, so important to society, is always willing to step back.

I want to speak, just before my time ends, to the whole question of fair access to regulated professions and the fact that we had a commission, an inquiry and a study done by Judge Thomson, who was commissioned to look at the whole question of setting up independent appeal tribunals for internationally trained professionals. Judge Thomson did that report, a very clear, coherent report with very readable, understandable recommendations. He said it was vital, if you wanted to ensure that people's credentials were recognized, that there be an independent tribunal to hear appeals. And yet when the act comes forward: no independent tribunal. However, buried in the act is a reference to giving the fairness commissioner set up by the act the instruction that they "may" look at the whole question of independent tribunals.

We continue to deal with a government that is focused on marketing, focused on appearance, but not focused on the priorities that are staring this government, this community, this province in the face. I think that to the extent that lack of commitment to priority, that lack of understanding of what needs to be done in this province, continues, this government will discredit itself and to some extent will discredit all politicians. I call on everyone in this House to vote against this bill.

1620

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthurs: I have just a very brief comment. The House schedule would normally call for sitting to end roughly in the last part of December and resume about mid-March. During the last couple of years, the House has chosen to sit from about mid-February until early March for three weeks or a month. Thus government and the House have set a priority on dealing with legislation, have actually added to the legislative agenda and the legislative schedule, in effect, to debate and see legislation approved.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): When you listen to the laundry list that the NDP thinks is important for this province, it's easy to see how they doubled the provincial debt in their four-and-a-half-year tenure.

Mr. Bisson: I guess those last comments—he never noticed the recession that was going on in Ontario. But that's another debate.

Anyway, I just want to commend my colleague the member for—

Ms. Horwath: Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Bisson: Toronto–Danforth. I was going to say Trinity–Spadina.

I think an important point that all of us are trying to make in this debate is that—for me personally, it's not the issue that I don't think MPPs work hard or are deserving of some increase. My God, I even heard Peter Kormos, the member from Niagara, on television today saying that a modest increase would be needed. But the issue is—for me specifically and I think for a lot of us—that there are a lot of people in our society who are hurting, and they look to provincial, federal and municipal governments to be there for them.

I look specifically at what's happening in my constituency. We've had the Tembec closure in Timmins and Smooth Rock Falls and Opasatika; we've had layoffs across the riding in the forestry sector, as we've had across northeastern and northwestern Ontario. I look at those workers and I say to myself that it would be very difficult for me to stand in this place and say that I'm going to vote in favour on the basis of them spending Christmas not having a salary come in the door.

I want to say for the record that I am one of the people who are going to accept the increase, and I want to say upfront why. I believe in trade union principles. If you negotiate an agreement—and the majority rules—everybody benefits from whatever the majority has ruled. As far as what happens in the end, in regard to whether I should or should not give it to charity, I think that's an individual decision of members. Everybody is in a different situation. Some people, because of circumstance, can or can't do those things. I, like others, am going to give some of that money to charity, but I'm going to say upfront that I'm not going to give it all. There are things in my own family situation that I have to take care of, and I have no difficulty with that. But I think it's important, in the end, to say to the constituents in my riding and others across this province that, when given the opportunity to say yea or nay, I'm going to vote nay in order to say to those workers who were laid off and others in our society who are looking to government for help, "We want government to listen to you as well."

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): We'll look forward to seeing if the member for Toronto–Danforth takes advantage of the opting-out clause, and if, indeed, there's a question of charitable giving, we look forward to seeing public disclosure of income tax statements to verify what they're doing.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I return to the member for Toronto–Danforth for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Tabuns: I appreciate the fact that the members for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, Halton, Timmins–James Bay and Peterborough all took advantage of the opportunity to speak to the matter before us.

The question of pay and compensation for MPPs and legislators is always a difficult question. There's no

getting around it. But I have to say, talking to people in coffee shops or in cabs, there is a feeling that the approach that this government has taken has been one that does not show the people of this province the respect they deserve. I think that those on the Liberal benches who agree with us should vote no. They are just as free to vote no as they would be in any other circumstance. If they don't agree with us, then that's their business. But if they want to go on at length, I say come along, vote no, and we'll go from there. Sit down with all three parties in the House and see if there's an agreement that all three can come to that's reasonable and something that could be justifiable to the people of this province. I would say elements of that have to be a reform of the pension plan and a much smaller increase than is presented. If that isn't the case, then I expect we will continue in this chamber. It's interesting to me, as Mr. Kormos had said earlier, that there's very little in the way of a defence on the part of members of the government. The odd sentence, but in terms of a reasoned analysis of questions before us and a defence of the government's bold move, I'm not hearing it, I'm not seeing it. I think they've just decided to keep their heads down and ride it out.

The Acting Speaker: I wish to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 37, the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Natural Resources concerning the funding of fish and wildlife programs in Ontario. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Further debate?

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I stand here somewhat surprised. I had not really known that I was going to be speaking today, but I was prepared to speak and I am prepared to speak.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Well, I am prepared to speak on this bill because it is a bill that is getting much publicity. It is a bill that my constituents are talking about. It is a bill that we have received e-mails, some letters, some phone calls about, and it is a bill I think that we all need to be on the record to say where we stand.

This is a very difficult bill. I'm going to tell you from the outset—I may not sound like all of the other New Democrats or even like the Liberals or Conservatives—this is a very difficult bill for politicians. Politicians are very good at beating themselves up. We are very good at taking shots at each other and we are very good at taking shots at ourselves. We are very good, over the long term, at saying that we are not deserving. We are very good at saying that politicians are overpaid.

Even within the life of this Parliament, one of the first actions of the new McGuinty government was to deny all of us a raise in our first year. If you remember that—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: I remember that, and being kind of angry, but the decision was made in caucus and we weren't going to speak out against it.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Does the member want to hear what I have to say or not?

Mr. Wilkinson: Oh, I'm listening.

Mr. Prue: Thank you. This is what happened even within this Parliament. Politicians were very mindful of the fact of a public backlash, very mindful of the fact of where we were going as a new Legislature, and were kind of reluctant to deal with this.

You can imagine my shock. You could have knocked me down—and probably you did—on that day last week when I walked into the House and one of the staff members from the NDP said, “Congratulations, you're getting a huge raise today; congratulations, your pension is going up; and congratulations, the severance package is going to be enormous.” I couldn't believe that that was in fact what was true.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Excuse me? If you want to speak, then at least—

The Acting Speaker: Member, take your seat. I would ask the member for Perth-Middlesex to refrain from heckling the member for Beaches-East York. He's obviously finding it quite annoying. I'll return to the member for Beaches-East York.

Mr. Prue: I don't mind a good heckle, but I would like to at least hear it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bisson: Or get it on the record.

Mr. Prue: Or put it on the record. I mean, if it's funny, we all need to hear it.

But you can imagine that when I found out that the NDP was not consulted and that, although the Conservatives were called in, although Mr. Tory was given an update and although the Conservatives had an opportunity to caucus among their members, we of course did not have that opportunity. So I have been weighing very much the arguments that have been made by the government since that time. I've tried to fathom in my own mind whether or not this is justifiable. Some of the arguments are exceedingly strong. I must admit some of them are strong and some of them are undoubtedly true.

The first statement that has been made is that, as politicians, we have a very stressful job. I don't have to tell all of you who are here today or all of you who are members of the Legislature how stressful this job can be: getting here early in the morning, going to scrums, going to caucus meetings, making speeches, answering questions, going to committee meetings in the afternoon, going out to community events at night, working on the weekends. I don't have to tell you that this is an extremely stressful job, and of course it is.

1630

Some of you have said we need to have pay raises that make us possibly equivalent to, in some measure, our federal or municipal politicians. Undoubtedly there is a corollary between the federal and the municipal governments. When you look at how much they're getting paid and how much we should get paid, I'm sure there is a logical argument that can be made there.

There is, of course, the whole argument that we have not kept up with inflation for most of the last 10 years, which is absolutely true. As I said at the beginning, we tend to beat each other and ourselves up. We have not kept up with inflation for the last 10 years.

There was an argument that we need to attract good candidates. I found this one a little bizarre, but that argument has been made, that we need to attract really good candidates.

The last argument I heard is that we need to stop the exodus of people who are leaving this place to go either to the federal government or, in some cases and recently, to municipal governments to seek election in those venues.

I weighed all of this very heavily and I started to think in terms of whether these arguments held water.

The first one I will acknowledge: This is a very stressful job. I'm not sure it's the most stressful job I've ever had, but I think it probably is. It is more stressful than being a councillor in the megacity of Toronto. And I will tell you that it's more stressful than being the mayor of the former borough of East York, because there I had a very large staff and there I was not called upon to be the critic of seven portfolios, to sit in the Speaker's chair, to go to committees and do all the other things that we are required to do in this small but very mighty little party. But I also think about other stressful positions: nurses, health care workers, teachers. They have stressful jobs too.

I looked at the other levels of government, and there is an institute, the Mad River Institute located out of Creemore, that looked at the wage—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Creemore, that little town. It's in your riding, is it not?

Mr. Wilkinson: Not mine.

Mr. Prue: Okay, but it's a lovely little town; I spent a few days there this summer. There is an institute there called the Mad River Institute that does analysis of wages of public officials. They determined that we, in fact, were underpaid. When they looked at the federal and municipal counterparts, though, they determined that they were overpaid and that we should not be basing our salary on theirs—that we, in fact, did deserve a modest increase, but that the increase should not be based on what they thought were overpaid people in the federal government and in some of the municipalities.

I looked at the answer that we've not kept up with inflation, and that is absolutely true, but that is true of almost literally every other workforce in this province. It is certainly true of those who are the most desperate and destitute in this province: those who earn minimum wage at \$7.75 an hour, those who are on ODSP or general welfare or Ontario Works. It is very true of our aboriginal communities and other people who live, in some cases, in very destitute poverty.

I looked at the argument about good candidates, and I started to think, well, what kind of candidates would we possibly get in this House that would be better than who

we are? I looked around, and we have lawyers, teachers, civil servants, people who were politicians in another life, electricians, ministers, social workers and social activists. That's just in this nine-member caucus. Then over there we have PhDs, we have lawyers, we have doctors, we have accountants, we have people who do marvellous things with money. We have people who do all kinds of things. I don't know how we could get better candidates, quite frankly, than what we have in this House. If that is the argument, that we need better candidates, I don't know who those better candidates are, unless you want to hire people who make hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars a year as corporate executives. Those are the only people who would be left that you could recruit and for whom money would be—

Mr. Bisson: Parkinson made \$1.6 million.

Mr. Prue: I'm not getting into Parkinson. I'm trying to be calm and rational here.

The whole thing comes down to, I don't buy the arguments. But in the end, I know what's going to happen here today. I'm not naive. I know that the government is going to use the might of its 70 members, plus the might of the 24 members of the Conservative caucus, and this bill is going to be passed.

So for the last number of days I have been looking at the fallout from that. I have listened to the statements that are being made back and forth in this House, which trouble me a great deal because, as I started out to say, politicians tend to beat each other up and we beat ourselves and others up. I have heard catcalls back and forth about millionaires. I don't know where that comes from and, quite honestly, if that refers to the payout that happened under the Harris government, all MPPs in this House who were here at this time were paid out. Every single member was paid out; all 150—because it was a much larger House—were paid out. So I don't know what that argument is, and I know it's being said. If there is a bogus argument that's being made or thrown across the floor, that is it.

Then I heard other arguments being made: "What are you going to do with the money?" I don't know how anyone can ask any of us what we're doing with the money. I do not question for a minute what any member of this House does with his or her paycheque. That is entirely up to you. I tell you, I do resent when people ask what I am going to do with my money. I'm going to be very blunt and tell you that if this raise goes through—and I expect it will—my wife and I have discussed this and we intend to give the bulk to charity. That is my choice. That is our choice. That is the choice that the two of us have made, because we consider this to be a windfall. To us, it is a windfall. I do not deny that my colleagues—I heard what Mr. Bisson had to say. He needs the money and he will spend it; he has a family. I don't begrudge him for a minute, nor do I begrudge what any person here wants to do with their money.

I'm only asking the members opposite to stop this catcall about what people do with their money. If I want to give my money to charity, I'm going to give it to

charity. If he wants to keep it, if you want to keep it, if you want to buy a house or a new car, if you want to go on vacation or if you want to do anything with it at all, that is entirely what you should do.

Interjections.

Mr. Prue: No, you don't need to vote for the bill, nor should you.

I'm telling you now, in final, why I am not voting for the bill. I was a municipal politician in my first year in the former borough of East York; I was a rookie councillor. A proposal was put forward in front of our council to raise the wages of the council in its first year of a new term. I remember the debate, I remember the tens and hundreds of people coming in from East York—because we had a very lively little democracy before it was done away with—who came, meeting after meeting, to argue that we should not be getting a salary increase.

What they said was very logical to me, and it holds true even today. We ran for political office knowing what the wages were going to be, and if we wanted to raise those wages—we were entitled to do so—we ought to do it for the next term of office, and the people who were running in the next term of office, which indeed could be us as well, could run on the basis of knowing what the wage was going to be and could either accept it or not accept it. That was a very logical statement to me. I believe that they were absolutely right. In the end, my colleagues on the council, on a vote of seven to two, voted to accept the salary.

I did not feel comfortable then and I do not feel comfortable now taking that salary immediately. I did not run on the basis of the money then. I took that money that year and I offered it, through the East York Foundation, to fund East York baseball. Those kids on the baseball team got the increase.

It wasn't \$22,000; it was a relatively modest amount of around \$600. But I took that money that year and for a number of subsequent years—the \$600, which I did not believe was justified during that term of office—and gave it so that kids could play baseball. That was my choice. Nobody said, "Hurray for you, Michael Prue." Nobody said, "You're a crazy man." Nobody ran up and down the streets saying that I did the wrong thing. It was not in my campaign literature; it is just what I felt comfortable doing. I did not feel that we should be taking money in the mid-term of our office, save and except that which was equivalent to inflation, which I would have accepted, but this was over and above that, and I did not feel comfortable.

1640

To this day, I believe that I made the right decision. To this day, I feel very comfortable with refusing what I considered to be the excess for that term of office and giving it to kids' baseball. I feel the same way today. I feel very comfortable in the period leading up to the next election in taking that money and giving it to charities that are deserving and needful of that money.

Come the next election, if the salary is \$110,000 per year, or whatever is set at that time and I run for office, if

I do so, then I will run for that salary. What I feel very uncomfortable about and what is very unfortunate about this government's bill is that you make it impossible for someone like me to say that I should not take this salary during this term of office. The bill says, not during this term of office, but for ever and always. You have to think about that. That means that if I were lucky enough to be elected three or four times subsequent, I could never again have another raise. That is a poison pill that no politician could accept, that no politician should accept. No politician in his or her right mind would ever do that. And then you have the temerity, the unmitigated gall, to yell across here, "Don't take it forever."

I don't know what the future is going to hold. I don't know what inflation rates are going to be like. I don't know what legislators are going to be paid. But I am bound and determined that all legislators should be paid the same. Every single one of them should be paid the same. What those legislators in turn do with their money is up to each and every one of them as individuals.

I heard people saying today, "Show us your income tax." I will gladly show you my income tax form on the same day that the Premier of the province of Ontario shows me his. I will gladly do it on the same day the member from Perth-Middlesex reveals his. I will gladly do it when the member for Willowdale reveals his and where he spends his money and where he makes his contributions. I will gladly do that when all of these people who shout these things across do it too.

This is not what is happening here. This is a bill which is very difficult. This is a bill that has a poison pill at the bottom, saying, "You either take it now or you give it up for all time." I am not willing to do that.

Interjections.

Mr. Prue: No. And neither are any of you. So to all the "Ahs," not a single one of you would do it either. I would do it if it was in the short term, if you listen to what I say. But of course, none of you ever do listen.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: The member is right. Many of the members of the House are not listening to his presentation, and I would appreciate if they would so that I can hear him as well.

I return to the member for Beaches-East York.

Mr. Prue: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that they're not wanting to listen.

The point is that if this were in the short term, for the balance of this Legislature, I would not have a problem with this. But that is not what this bill says. So I am going to take the money, as I have told the press and as I'm telling you, and I am going to do what I did as a mayor and what I did as a councillor: I am going to give that portion which I do not believe is justified to worthy causes. I think that's all I can do—

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): How long?

Mr. Prue: —and I will do that for the balance of the term of this council. In the next election, I will do exactly what I need to do at that point. This has a long and

honourable tradition. This is a tradition that has been reported. I even have—

Interjections.

Mr. Prue: Mr. Speaker, can I continue speaking, or do I have to—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask members of the House to come to order, for the member for Willowdale, the member for Perth—Middlesex and all the other members who are heckling to stop it. If necessary, I will take decisive action to allow the member for Beaches—East York to conclude his presentation.

I'll return to the member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Prue: This is precisely what was done in the federal government and in the federal House for many years. It's precisely what many members of Parliament did as far back as 1975, and it's entirely what I intend to do as well.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much more I can add because I don't know how much longer they will remain quiet. But having said what I needed to say, I thank everyone for the limited attention that was given.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthurs: I appreciate the comments from the member from Beaches—East York. I've known him for a great number of years and I always respect his point of view.

Having said that quickly, I have been in these processes before, as he has been, municipally. This is a process we're undertaking with some nine months left in this mandate. It's not as though we're at the beginning of the mandate. In fact, it has been three years since any significant consideration was given. It's an appropriate time in which to put it in place so people know, going to the polls, exactly what the status is, not what the status might be.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean—Carleton): I just wanted to say that we were talking a little bit about the calendar this week. I'm actually pleased to be sitting today so that I was able to raise a very important issue in my constituency, which is to save Bam Bam the deer and bring him back to the Greely farm that he was brought up on. So this has given me and my constituents a unique opportunity to raise some issues that are very important to our community.

Mr. Bisson: I appreciate the comments made by the member for Beaches—East York. I think he was trying to be genuine and honest, as I think all members try to be in this place, when it comes to what his approach is and what his rationale is for this particular vote.

He raises a point that's important, and I think it's one that we need to say. There's never a good time, as some people have said around here about how members treat each other when it comes to increases or whatever we might do to benefits or wages. Basically all of us—I see people pointing fingers; I wish you wouldn't point at your colleague across the way, because I think he's an honourable guy—at times have engaged in a little bit of bashing when it comes to these things. And I understand

why, because sometimes there are some reasons, and you have to accept it. There are some people here who genuinely feel that the increase is excessive, and they are doing it on the basis of their conviction. For members in this House to say somehow or other that's disingenuous, I think is not respectful of what a person's position might be. I also accept in this debate that there are people who feel it is something that's perfectly acceptable, and I personally don't appreciate people trying to drag personalities into this.

The other thing I say is that I respect the member, because he raises a point that I think is—something that he reminded me about, back when this issue came up about three years ago. If you remember, the government of the day under Ernie Eves had introduced legislation to in effect do what we're doing today. The idea with that legislation was that we'd get the increase after the next election. We know that didn't work either. So the point he tried to make was that until the next Parliament, he feels that for himself, for his own reasons, he is going to give the lion's share of it, or all of it—I'm not too sure where he falls on that—to charity. Others will give it all; myself, I'll only give some. But we need to respect that members will do what they will do. I don't have the right to take a look at how an individual member spends his or her money, and I think we should be able to respect that.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Regardless of what you may think about the opinion or the beliefs of the member for Beaches—East York, you have to respect the fact that he is an intelligent, impassioned, articulate, good debater. Frankly, I think this man deserves a raise.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Prue: I'd like to thank the members from Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, Nepean—Carleton, Timmins—James Bay, and especially my friend from Mississauga West. As a matter of fact, I may even lift that portion of Hansard and put it on my re-election brochure.

In any event, what I was trying to say and what I firmly and honestly believe is that we have, as legislators, an obligation to reflect very strongly on what our communities want, what our communities expect, and, within ourselves, what we think is personally right and correct. In my own view, I believe that wages, save and except those that come through inflation and inflationary measures in small amounts, should be increased only at the time of taking office, that the Parliament should be setting the amount for the next government, and those who are elected should obtain and get that amount of money. That's what I feel comfortable with; that's what I would vote for. And if that's what this bill was, I would vote and I would agree with the member from Mississauga West, not only about myself but about the 103 other individuals here in this Legislature—or the 103 who will be here in this Legislature, because I don't know how many are coming back or who's not running again.

Interjection: It's 107.

Mr. Prue: It will be 107.

But I do personally feel difficulty in taking money mid-term. That is why I cannot take the money. That's why in the mid-term, I will be giving my money or the bulk of the money to charity. I feel comfortable with that. It's what I did as a municipal councillor; it's what I will do now. I cannot refuse, because if I am lucky enough to be back here, then I expect to be paid the same as everyone else. I cannot take the option that is contained within the bill, and you need to understand that. Nor should anyone be expected to do it, which is why, in fact, no one is doing it.

So that's my position. I thank all of those who had an opportunity to comment.

1650

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. I find it regrettable that I have but 20 minutes to speak to this proposition, this government's Bill 173.

The bill and the debate are not about the MPPs here at Queen's Park. This debate is about Christopher Hagan from Orangeville. He writes to me, "The rate of increase they are attempting to allot" with Bill 173 "more than doubles my annual income of just over \$11,520; this is a combination of assistance from Ontario disability support program, ODSP, and WSIB. My illnesses and debilitating pains are not something I have chosen." That's what this debate is about. It is about Mr. Hagan, who as a WSIB and ODSP recipient has an annual income of \$11,520 and continues to cope, to attempt to live with ongoing, debilitating pain.

This debate isn't about MPPs. It's about Henry Perry, and my colleague the Minister of Tourism will know what he speaks of when he writes, "I will not be getting any raise this Christmas as I'm one of the 500-plus Dana employees" who lost their jobs and who are unlikely to ever get them back.

We've had occasion to consider before in this chamber—I know we have, because I remember participating in the discussions. I remember trying to paint the picture of a person like Henry Perry, who can be a life-long industrial worker, working hard, working skilled, working dangerous, earning a middle-class income, paying middle-class taxes, consuming goods like middle-class consumers do—persons who after a year or perhaps less of UIC, or EI, as they call it now, when their jobs are taken from them, like the jobs of those workers at Dana, can end up on welfare. That's when families disintegrate and that's when lives start to unravel.

The debate's not about us. It is about Christopher Hagan and it's about Henry Perry.

The debate's not about us. It's about Terry Stokoe from Hamilton: "Unfortunately my, and thousands of other, indexed pension pay raises are linked to the consumer price index which translates to a 2.5% pay raise for 2007."

It's about Sara Ramsey and people like her. "Thousands of Ontarians are losing their jobs," she writes, "and the poor in Canada are getting poorer. Those of us who

toil for minimum wage (or less) don't have the luxury of taking a holiday because we've mouths to feed and bills to pay. To be honest, I have never made even \$22,000 a year."

These aren't fictional characters; these are real Ontarians. These are good people, hard-working people, people who are committed to their families, people who are committed to this province and to this country, people who are committed to their kids and their grandkids. "To be honest, I have never even made \$22,000 a year," Sara Ramsey writes.

Peter doesn't enclose his last name, but he has his e-mail address at rogers.com. "It is also worth noting that the Liberal government gives themselves a 25% pay increase yet feels that a 2% increase in ODSP payments which amounts to only \$20 a month will be sufficient after 12 years of inflation with no increase during this time."

This debate's about the woman I told you about the other day, the worker in a small franchise supermarket where I stopped in, walking from Queen's Park to my apartment at 6:30 p.m. And as she's bagging the loaf of bread and other assorted groceries, she looks at me and says, "Can you stop him?" I didn't know what she meant, and I said, "Pardon?" Here is this woman, 60, 65 years old, a cashier. She's on her feet all day. You can do that when you're 20 and 25; it gets a little harder when you're 60 and 65, especially if you're a woman who's had a few kids and the veins in the leg start breaking down. That's what happens.

I said, "Pardon?" She said, "Can you stop the pay increase?" I said, "Ma'am, I don't think so. There's only nine of us, but we're doing our best." She said, "Because, you see, I'm not working by choice; I'm working to pay for groceries. I'm making \$7.75 an hour." That's the minimum wage in Ontario right now. And she said, "And the employer doesn't even provide ballpoint pens; the staff have to bring their own ballpoint pens." That's who this debate is about. My goodness, a 25% salary increase come Christmastime for MPPs; 25 cents for minimum wage workers, and they've got to wait until February 2007.

The Premier says it's never a good time. Dalton McGuinty, the Premier of Ontario, says, "It's never a good time to raise MPPs' salaries, so what the heck, let's just do it." And during question period, whether it's my colleague from Hamilton East or from Trinity-Spadina or from Timmins-James Bay or from Nickel Belt or from Kenora-Rainy River or Toronto-Danforth or Parkdale-High Park or Beaches-East York, when my colleagues question the government about their failure to raise the minimum wage to \$10 now, the response is, "Well, it's not a good time, so we won't."

When New Democrats question the government, "Why aren't people receiving disability pensions participating in some catch-up to make up for all the lost years?" the Premier says, "Now is not the right time," so the government won't. And when New Democrats stand up and ask why social assistance recipients, inevitably

kids, children, little children—they haven't had catch-up either, not even close to restoring the 21%-plus that was cut from their benefits 10 years ago now. When New Democrats say, "Why aren't those people getting some catch-up in their benefits?" the Premier of Ontario, Mr. McGuinty, says, "It's not a good time," so the government doesn't.

But the Premier says it's never a good time to raise MPPs' salaries, and he does. I ask you, is that fair? Is that fair? Like you, I've had a whole lot of people talk to me over the course of the last week and a half about this very issue, down where I come from in Niagara region, here in Toronto and a few other parts of the province as well.

1700

You know, Ontarians are prepared to be very fair with their politicians, whether they're municipal politicians, provincial politicians or federal politicians. Ontarians have made it clear to me, and I'm sure they have made it clear to you, that they are prepared to be very fair about salaries for their politicians. Why aren't you prepared to be fair to them about minimum wage, disability benefits and social assistance?

Why aren't you prepared to be fair to the poorest moms in this province, struggling in a way that most people in this chamber have never seen, never mind imagined, to raise kids? Why can't you be fair to them? Keep your promise to end, end, end the child benefit clawback. It's federal money that's designed to assist the poorest moms and their kids here in Ontario to literally put food on the table. We're talking about hungry Canadians. Oh, not the poor in spirit; kids literally suffering from inadequate nutritional intake. You see, that same mom is prepared to be fair to you when it comes to your salaries, her city council's salaries or her federal member's salary. She is. I've talked to her over and over again. She asked for you to be fair to her and her kids when it comes to you keeping your promise to end the clawback of child benefits.

The government, the Premier, would have been delighted if New Democrats had joined Messrs. McGuinty and Tory in that backroom and cut the deal they wanted, which was to ram this bill through in the dark of the night, second and third readings, one fell swoop, with no exposure to the public. What were you thinking? New Democrats weren't going to have any part of that, and you know it. You ought to have known it. If you didn't know it, how dare you suggest that you should be paid more than you are now?

I have no shame, and I have nothing but pride in my colleagues—New Democrats here at Queen's Park—and in our leader for having exposed this dirty deal and having ensured that at the very least the public knows what you're doing to them. Because if you had had your druthers, this would have been wrapped up, tied up with a bow and passed willy-nilly, boom, boom, on an evening sitting, in the absence of the press gallery, in the course of but five minutes. Make no mistake about it.

This was such a clandestine operation that even members of cabinet weren't made aware that this was in

the works, never mind backbenchers. We know that because we read their comments in the press. I read the comments of the member for Niagara Falls, Kim Craitor. On Monday, December 11, the member for Niagara Falls told the Niagara Falls Review that "he didn't support" increasing MPPs' pay. "I knew what the salary was when I ran. I consider myself extremely well paid," he said. "I enjoy what I do and I think I'm very fortunate." That particular government backbencher obviously had no idea whatsoever that this pot was being stirred, that this little concoction was being cooked up.

His regional counterpart, long-time—in fact a veteran, a senior member of this chamber, a person for whom I have the highest regard and respect, the Minister of Tourism—didn't know either. Also on Monday, St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley, who is also government House leader, told the Review, "I don't anticipate you'll see any significant action on this at all" and that a large pay increase for MPPs "is not going to happen."

Sault Ste. Marie member David Oraziotti, when he was called by the Sault Star at his constituency office in Sault Ste. Marie with news of the pay raise legislation, to the reporter from the Sault Star: "What? Where did you hear that?" Oraziotti said, when asked to comment on the raise. And "Oraziotti said he isn't personally concerned about his rate of pay."

The Premier tells us that MPPs have to be paid more; they have to be paid a salary closer to the federal salary so that quality people can be attracted. Then what the heck are you? The Premier says, "If we don't increase MPPs' salaries, we won't attract quality people." Well, there you are, my friends. If the Premier is trying to tell Ontarians that you've got to pay politicians \$144,000 and change a year—federal MP salaries—to get quality people, just take a look at some of the clunkers sitting in the federal Parliament. Do you want me to start naming names, Mr. Zimmer? Because I can start naming names. Man, oh man. What false, distorted logic and what a silly effort to try to peddle a sad deal.

So I say to colleagues here—and I say to the leader of the Conservative Party, you who came to Queen's Park as a breath of fresh air, as somebody who was going to do things very differently: You've lost your virginity; you are now Preston Manning in Stornoway. You've illustrated that the Tories are just like the Liberals. You've made it clear, leader of the Conservative Party, interestingly named Mr. Tory, that when it comes to self-interest, when it comes to self-serving, when it comes to backroom dealing, why, the Conservatives under their new leader can match anything that they were under previous leaders.

Which of you are going to put in your householder—oh, you won't publish one before Christmas, I trust. I suggest that you'll probably publish one in February, maybe the beginning of March, to get it in under this budget. Which one of you, in your householder, Liberal and Conservative colleagues, is going to put on the front page that "Your member, blank, MPP for riding blank, takes pleasure at having narrowed the gap," Mr. Bradley,

“between provincial MPPs’ pay and federal MPs’ pay”? Which one of you in the next provincial election campaign, when you inevitably publish the newspaper ad listing your achievements, is going to say, “I went to the wall for MPPs at Queen’s Park, but I told people at minimum wage to go pound salt; I told people receiving disability pensions to forget it”? Which of the Liberal or Conservative members here are going to brag about having enriched themselves with salary, with pension, with severance pay à la Tom Parkinson? It seems the only thing you’ve learned from the Parkinson scandal over at Hydro One is how to do it. Which one of you is going to tell moms on social assistance who haven’t had their 21.9% restored that you choose yourself over them? Which one of you?

1710

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I’d just like to add a comment to the comments of the member from Niagara Centre, who is probably the best thespian that we have within the Legislature and has a tremendous sense of hyperbole. You’ll notice that not once did he make any reference to the recommendations by an independent officer of this Legislature called the Integrity Commissioner. Not once did he make any reference to that, or to the discussion or review, or criticize that. He completely ignored that, which was the basis on which much of what is happening now was presented.

Mr. O’Toole: As has been said, the member from Niagara Centre is always entertaining and committed and passionate on Bill 173, as all members are.

But I want to digress for a moment, as I missed mentioning the grandparents, Barb and Ralph Grant of Nova Scotia, in my remarks before. They’re also grandparents of Mollie Barbara Ann Grant, born July 28. Of course, the parents are Rebecca and Erin O’Toole, Erin being my son and Rebecca being their daughter.

Also, secondly, John and Leslie Lines of Kent, England, are grandparents of Peter John Lines, born just last week on December 15, 2006. The parents there are Marnie and Ben Lines of Sevenoaks, England, our daughter and our son-in-law. Peggy and I are both grateful for their health and for delivering two of our grandchildren—now four grandchildren.

How does it relate to Bill 173? It’s all about having quality people in the world. I believe that I’ve been fortunate to be the grandparent of two lovely grandchildren who are quality people.

Ms. Martel: In response to the comments made by my colleague from Niagara Centre, let me make a few comments. I said to the local media that the argument that we need to raise pay to attract quality candidates was an absolutely bogus argument, and it surely is. I’ve run in five elections now and I can tell you that every political party has been represented in terms of mainstream political parties. In many cases, more than the mainstream has been represented. There have been contested nominations in the other parties. I think that those people who ran for the Liberals in particular would feel somewhat

slighted and somewhat insulted on hearing that the government said we had to raise pay more in order to attract quality people. They must ask themselves, “Who are we and what are we?”

I didn’t understand how the Liberal backbenchers in particular weren’t really astonished by the kind of back-of-the-hand they got last week when the minister said, “Here we are, the farm team. We need to raise pay so we can attract quality candidates.” What does that say about everybody here? What does that say about all of our colleagues? That none of us are quality candidates? That none of us bring to this job skills and expertise and work that is important to the rest of Ontarians? What does that say about everybody who is here now working on behalf of the people of Ontario? That we’re the farm team? That we’re not qualified and capable? That was surely the inference. That was surely the reference. That was surely the conclusion that one had to draw from the comments that were made by the minister last week.

We should be here dealing with the priorities of average Ontarians, keeping the government to account with respect to the promise it made to end the clawback when it hasn’t. We should be here raising ODSP rates, because the fact of the matter is, with the increase in inflation, they are worse off now than they were under the Conservatives. We should be here ensuring that people who are working at a minimum wage full time are receiving a living wage. These are clearly not the priorities for this government.

Mr. Berardinetti: I just want to ask a couple of questions of the member for Niagara Centre. The city of Toronto recently increased their salary quite a lot. I just wanted his views on that and what he thinks about that; and secondly, what he thinks of the Integrity Commissioner’s report and if he has any comments on that. I’d really like to hear what he thinks of the Integrity Commissioner’s comments.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I return to the member for Niagara Centre for his two-minute response.

Mr. Kormos: I appreciate the member for Scarborough Southwest putting questions to me. I say to you, member from Scarborough Southwest, when are you going to show the same passion for minimum wage earners that you show for yourself today? When are you going to show the same passion for people being crippled by poverty on disability pensions? When are you going to show the same passion for them that you show for yourself today? I say to the member for Scarborough Southwest, Mr. Berardinetti, when are you going to stand up and speak for moms with kids who are having their federal child benefit clawed back by your government? When are you going to do that? I say to the member for Scarborough Southwest, when are you going to have the courage to tell your Premier to put the poorest people, the most vulnerable people, the weakest people, first? I say to the member for Scarborough Southwest, when are you going to get up on your feet in this Legislature and give your government notice that you’re not going to tolerate

this government's inaction when it comes to the 110,000 or 120,000 industrial jobs lost here in the province of Ontario, driving families into unprecedented poverty? I say to the member for Scarborough Southwest—and please feel free to include my comments in your next householder—when are you going to have the guts and the gumption to think for yourself, rather than simply reading the crib notes that are passed out to feckless government backbenchers? When are you going to do more than simply be a little spin machine for a desperate government?

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Bountrogianni has moved second reading of Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

I wish to inform the House that I have received a deferral notice from the chief whip of the New Democratic Party: “Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I hereby request

that the division on the second reading of Bill 173 be deferred until deferred votes during routine proceedings on Wednesday, December 20, 2006.”

Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Before we can deal with that motion, I wish to inform the House that when a motion to adjourn the House carries before the usual 6 p.m. adjournment hour, a scheduled adjournment debate late show is automatically carried over to the next sessional day on which such debates are held, which is in this case Thursday. Therefore, the late show originally scheduled for today is carried over to Thursday.

Mr. Bradley has moved the adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

As such, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1719.

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 20 December 2006

Mercredi 20 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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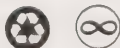
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 20 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 20 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PENSION PLANS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): Today I'm calling on the McGuinty Liberal government to allow Ontarians to have full access to their, and I emphasize "their," locked-in retirement savings accounts. Four of the provinces in Canada have opened up access to the principal in these accounts, ranging from 25% in New Brunswick, to 50% in Alberta, to 100% in Saskatchewan, and soon to be 100% in Manitoba.

Under current Ontario rules, our residents can only access the principal in their accounts if they can prove to a government board dire financial or health need through a bureaucratic appeal process. The only exceptions to this rule are current and former members of this assembly who had their defined benefit pensions terminated and rolled into locked-in accounts. Those members, and I'm one of them, can access 100% of the principal. This is wrong and needs to be corrected. There should not be two classes of citizens for pension rules, and the time is long overdue for government to cease its paternalistic "We know what's best" approach to Ontario retirees.

Premier and members of the Liberal government, I urge you to move quickly to allow Ontarians full access to their locked-in pensions.

TERRY JAMES

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I rise today to honour and pay tribute to my friend, a passionate golfer and one of Pickering's most active volunteers, Terry James, whose recent passing was a loss not only to his friends and family but to the community at large. Terry's astute sense of humour, his dedication to Pickering over the past 23 years and his ability to engage people in public life were among his many admirable qualities.

I first met Terry when he founded the Pickering Civitan service club, and we continued to work together thereafter. Terry James won an individual volunteer award in 2004 at the city of Pickering civic awards ceremony, and it was well deserved. He was father to three children and husband to his wife Marie. Terry was

also an organizer of the St. Paul's on-the-Hill food bank Christmas luncheon for children and their families. He was a member of the Pickering Museum Village advisory committee as well as founder and past president of the Pickering Civitan Club. Terry was chairman of the Hospice Durham golf tournament for Girls Inc. and, most recently, president of the Durham Region Senior Games. Mr. James was also the president of the new Pickering–Scarborough East Liberal riding association.

To say that Terry was involved is an understatement. After his retirement in 1998 from the city of Scarborough, he became even more passionately involved to better the city of Pickering. I, on behalf of his community, extend my deepest condolences once again to his wife and extended family. We'll all remember him with deep admiration and miss his kind, selfless spirit.

MURIEL VERCH

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I rise today to recognize a constituent of mine, Muriel Verch, who was just recently named Country Woman of the Year by Country Woman Magazine, an international publication based in the United States.

Muriel was chosen from hundreds of applicants, which were narrowed down to three finalists late last summer. She was nominated by her daughter, April, who besides being a devoted daughter, is one of the Ottawa Valley's most talented and accomplished musicians.

It has been said of Muriel, "You couldn't pay Muriel Verge to serve her community." She insists on doing it for free. As April said, "She's the most generous and selfless person I know."

Muriel is a community leader who has been organizing children's Christmas parties, youth events, dinners for seniors and the winter carnival for over 25 years. She was chair of the Rankin fire station support group, which raised over \$70,000 to establish a fire station where none existed. She's active raising funds for Valley Heritage Radio, serves as an elder and treasurer in her church and as a director of the annual Knights of Columbus Irish play. In addition, she has, of course, taken care of her family in a most admirable fashion.

Muriel was chosen Country Woman of the Year by virtue of receiving the most votes among the three finalists. I want to thank the good people of my riding for taking the time to ensure that a fine Valley woman would receive this honour. I was pleased to encourage them to do so when Muriel was chosen as a finalist. To Muriel,

her husband, Ralph, and her entire family, congratulations. It is well deserved.

To everyone everywhere, may the love of Christ be with you this Christmas and always.

PENSION PLANS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's time that the McGuinty government allowed Ontario's seniors to unlock their locked-in pensions. Bill 175, my private member's bill, would allow seniors to withdraw up to 100% of their locked-in pension funds. This one measure would instantly add to our seniors' financial independence and quality of life at no cost to the taxpayer.

CARP, Canada's Association for the Fifty Plus, supports my bill 100%. Bill 175 would unlock the vault of pension savings that McGuinty Liberal MPPs are withholding from locked-in pensioners while they care for themselves and their own life savings plans.

I'm sure many people would be surprised to learn that once pensions are locked in, it's virtually impossible for Ontario's seniors to access their money. Only at age 90 can seniors withdraw their funds completely. Until then they are limited to a scant withdrawal of 2.5% to 6.2% of the principal. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick and the federal government have already changed their laws to enable seniors to access some or all of their locked-in pensions. But in Ontario, only 61 MPPs have had the freedom to unlock their pensions. For everyone else, these pensions are locked tight, cannot be withdrawn except in dire circumstances and only with government approval. Why should our seniors have to put up their hands and ask permission to access their own money, which they saved up over a lifetime of hard work?

Unlike the McGuinty Liberals, I trust seniors to manage their own money. Let's unlock pensions for Ontario seniors. They have worked hard all their lives and deserve to reap the fruits of their contributions. Seniors deserve the right to access and to control their locked-in pensions, and the McGuinty government should respect that right.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): What's the fastest growing crime in North America? Yes, it is identity theft. In 2004, over 10 million people in North America had their identity stolen.

We now have the latest statistics on identity theft in Canada. One and a half million Canadians were subject to identity theft for the purpose of fraud. How do these fraudsters get our personal information in the first place? The privacy commissioner tells us that dishonest employees steal personal information. While there is little our citizens can do to protect themselves from dishonest employees, there's certainly something they can do when requested to provide personal information, such as filling out a registration card for a warranty on an appliance, or

for a magazine subscription, renting a video or even filling out a contest card or, horror of horrors, providing personal banking information to someone in Nigeria or South Africa who wants to transfer a million dollars into their account.

To its credit, the McGuinty government is providing a number of programs, educating the consumer as to the pitfalls of phishing and data mining. But none of these programs or laws will prevent identity theft unless we have informed citizens. The best way to create an educated, vigilant citizenry certainly is to begin in our schools.

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NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): It has now been 296 days of occupation at the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision in Caledonia. As we mark the end of 2006, the empty words and lack of leadership of the McGuinty government mean no end is in sight for the area.

Since February 28, the occupation has resulted in chaos and mayhem, and now fear and intimidation continue as a normal part of daily life. Mr. McGuinty watches and he says, "I'm pleased that things are in a more peaceful state these days in Caledonia." That was said a week ago today. Nothing could be further from the truth.

At 1 a.m. this past Sunday, a house on Argyle Street in Caledonia was ransacked by yet-to-be-identified intruders. The intruders smashed and overturned furniture. The intruders urinated in three rooms. The intruders injured the family's border collie. The intruders spray-painted racist and vulgar expressions on the walls and mirrors. For 10 months now, people have been worried about property values, vandalism and noise.

On June 16, this government made a promise to people in Caledonia to provide emergency funding for those directly affected. The act of vandalism this past Sunday is a case in point. Who would buy a house in this market today? The people of Caledonia continue to ask when this government will stand up for them, when the needed compensation will be forthcoming.

MOUVEMENT D'IMPLICATION FRANCOPHONE D'ORLÉANS

M. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): Jeudi dernier, j'étais très fier d'être au Centre du Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans, aussi connu sous le nom de Centre MIFO.

Ce jour-là, la Fondation Trillium leur a fait une allocation de 85 000 \$. Ces fonds seront utilisés pour améliorer les locaux de l'école de musique du MIFO.

Cela fait 28 ans que le Mouvement d'implication francophone d'Orléans œuvre sur plusieurs volets. Le MIFO se consacre depuis toutes ces années aux besoins de la communauté d'Orléans. Le MIFO répond aux

besoins artistiques, culturels, sociocommunautaires et éducatifs en offrant des services variés en français.

Il me fit un grand plaisir aussi de voir le MIFO s'impliquer dans le nouveau centre des arts qui sera construit tout prochainement sur le boulevard Centrum, dans ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Orléans.

Ceci dit, le MIFO aura accès aux autres locaux à Orléans et à une salle de spectacle qui pourra accueillir 500 personnes.

Annuellement, près de 35 000 clients utilisent les services du MIFO. Sa programmation artistique, culturelle et sociale est un exemple qui démontre que le MIFO est à l'écoute de sa communauté.

Je voudrais prendre cette occasion pour remercier l'équipe du MIFO qui, sous la gestion de M^{me} Marie-Claude Doucet et grâce à la participation de leur conseil d'administration, et aussi aux efforts de Patrick Bourbonnais, directeur artistique, assure que le MIFO est plus qu'un centre culturel et communautaire.

ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I rise today to speak to the continued good work of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, through the Ministry of Culture, by providing funding for so many worthy projects both in my riding and in the province.

In November, I was able to announce that the Trillium Foundation had committed \$81,200 over 24 months to the Lake Huron Learning Collaborative in Goderich. This organization has a membership that represents a number of organizations within the community, including local school boards, the Huron United Way, Women Today of Huron, municipal governments and individuals from a variety of sectors. Their goal as an organization is to create a learning centre that draws upon the environmental, cultural and historical aspects of the Great Lakes and rural heritage in order to offer residents of the community lifelong learning and post-secondary educational opportunities.

Lake Huron Learning Collaborative has been working on developing a centre of learning in Huron county for over two years, and it has recently reached agreement with the University of Western Ontario to offer two first-year university courses in Goderich this fall. Bringing post-secondary education to the riding of Huron-Bruce meets our educational goals as it may not have been previously able to do.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation continues to support this province's small communities and the projects that make them unique and successful.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Since being elected in 1999, I made the commitment to bring the messages, the hopes and dreams, and the needs and desires of the people of my riding to Queen's Park to seek support, co-operation and partnership.

Today, I am pleased to report to this House that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smith-erman, announced the approval of an MRI machine in the Brantford General Hospital. Since we were elected government, I have worked to ensure that the Minister of Health has been aware of my community's health care needs and our belief that we could support an MRI. This piece of vital equipment will mean that the BGH can perform over 4,000 scans each year. For people receiving these scans who get a clean bill of health, it will mean quicker peace of mind. For others, it may mean a fighting chance against a disease like cancer where early detection is vital. It means that we will no longer have to leave our community to receive this service, and it will continue to drive down wait times.

On behalf of my community, I've been telling both our government and the previous government that an MRI is an important tool for the Brantford General Hospital. I am proud to have spoken out on the need for an MRI, and I am even more proud that this government listened and took action.

Thank you to the staff and volunteers of the BGH for your patience and co-operation. Thank you also to the many individuals and organizations doing fundraisers to help purchase this machine. I would like to especially thank the Rizzo family, who have spearheaded our community's efforts. This MRI belongs to the whole community.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FILM CLASSIFICATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CLASSEMENT DES FILMS

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 180, An Act to amend the Film Classification Act, 2005 / Projet de loi 180, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2005 sur le classement des films.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): This bill would give the government power to make regulations requiring an exhibitor to devote a prescribed amount of exhibition time to films made in Canada and prescribing what constitutes Canadian content. We have need of support for the Canadian film industry. This bill will provide some of that support.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forth a motion without notice regarding the meeting times of committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the following committees be authorized to meet during the winter adjournment, in accordance with the schedule of meeting dates agreed to by the whips of the recognized parties and tabled with the Clerk of the Assembly, to examine and inquire into the following matters:

The standing committee on finance and economic affairs to consider matters related to pre-budget consultations 2007;

Standing committee on the Legislative Assembly to consider Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system;

Standing committee on government agencies for up to five days for agency review pursuant to the terms of reference as set out in standing order 106(e); and

Standing committee on public accounts for up to four days pursuant to its terms of reference as set out in standing order 106(g);

And that the committees be authorized to release the reports during the winter adjournment by depositing a copy of any report with the Clerk of the Assembly, and upon the resumption of the meetings of the House, the chairs of such committees shall bring any reports before the House in accordance with the standing orders.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

HEALTH CARE

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I rise in the House today to announce the launch of our government's public dialogue about health care in Ontario. This engagement with Ontarians is essential to the development of a 10-year strategic plan for the province's health system. Why? Because it is their health care system. When our government first took office three years ago, we immediately began significant changes to the way health care was being delivered in Ontario. That's because we knew that patients were waiting too long to get the care that they needed. We knew there weren't enough doctors,

nurses and other health care professionals in this province. We knew there was no sustained focus on promoting wellness and preventing illness, so we tackled the most pressing problems first.

We have achieved much in the last few years. Ontarians have more access to doctors and nurses than before. Wait times for key procedures have come down, including MRI and CT scans; cancer, cardiac and cataract surgeries and hip and knee replacements. But collectively, we've got more work to do. Now we want to look at what needs to be done to ensure that our health care system will be there for Ontarians in the future. We are in this together. Our system serves us all. So the preservation of our health care system is nothing short of sacred. It's the best expression of Canadian values. That's why our government is such a passionate defender of medicare. But defending medicare doesn't mean defending the status quo. Medicare must change to meet the needs of the people that it serves. That's why we've been making significant and innovative changes, changes that have been guided by a vision and a vision that's been realized through a well-thought-out plan.

One of the most important changes we've made is to provide for more local control for the planning, funding and delivery of health care through Ontario's 14 local health integration networks. LHINs have come to life and fostered a new level of dialogue about health care—this time at the level where citizens can participate. That's thanks in great part to the public consultations they've been conducting in their communities. The input from these consultations has informed the LHINs integrated health services plans, which are their three-year plans for local delivery of health services. Further to that, when we passed the Local Health System Integration Act, it created an onus on us to develop a provincial strategic plan for the health system that includes a vision, priorities and strategic directions for the health care system. That's a huge challenge and a huge responsibility. We can't do it without listening to the thoughts, concerns and ideas from the people of Ontario. That's why we're reaching out to Ontarians interested in health care to get their views on the development of the plan.

Ontarians care deeply about the health care they receive and want to know how the system will serve their children and will be there for their grandchildren. That's why we want to hear from as many people as possible to determine the overall direction Ontario needs to take when it comes to health care.

The plan will articulate what Ontarians want their health care system to be in the future, what kinds of needs must be met and how services can be improved, with the ultimate objective of ensuring the sustainability of the health care system. This planning and open dialogue with Ontarians will help in the development of three-year, five-year and 10-year goals, strategies and expectations for all levels of our health care system. Among other benefits, this strategic approach will help to move our health care system away from simply reacting to and solving the problems of today. Together with

people from across the province, we will develop the 10-year plan over the coming months, with an expected release date in the spring of 2007.

To get that done we're inviting as many Ontarians as possible, representing the diversity of our province's population, to take part in the process. To hear from as broad a range of Ontarians as possible, we'll be working with people at the local level—our LHIN partners, our health professionals, administrators, volunteers—but most of all, we'll be listening to patients through meetings and through meaningful dialogue. We'll have a website—ourplanforhealthcare.ca—and a toll-free number set up to enable people to provide feedback and to give them access to information, including ways to get further involved.

The information gleaned through the public dialogue will be the most significant resource in developing our strategic plan. That's why we'll be building on the advice gathered by the local health integration networks during their own public dialogues and on patient satisfaction findings gathered through the health system. We'll also be building on research and we'll be using input from health care providers to determine how to best respond to patient needs.

I can't overemphasize the importance of this public dialogue in the development of our plan for health. The onus is on all of us to ensure a health system that will deliver the quality of health care that Ontarians expect and to which they are entitled.

GROWTH PLANNING

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I am delighted to be here today to share with this House and with my colleagues that our provincial government has won a prestigious American Planning Association national award for Places to Grow, the growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe. I'm pleased that Ontario is being recognized internationally as a leader in growth planning.

The growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe is the cornerstone of an ambitious package of government initiatives that includes the greenbelt, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority and, of course, ReNew Ontario, our five-year, \$30-billion-plus infrastructure investment plan. It's a plan that will help us realize a sustainable and prosperous future. The growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe is the first plan from outside the United States to win the American Planning Association's Daniel Burnham Award.

The American Planning Association is the pre-eminent national professional planning organization in the United States, representing 39,000 professional planners, officials and citizens. This is a true honour and it puts Ontario at the forefront of an effort in sustainable development.

The American Planning Association gives this award to the plan that best illustrates progress, community benefit and contribution to the advancement of the

planning profession. It is awarded to a plan which best represents the APA slogan of "Making great communities happen," which is what this government, under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, is working to achieve through the Places to Grow Act, creating healthier, more sustainable communities and improving our quality of life.

The growth plan reduces development pressures on important natural areas and agricultural lands and ties long-term growth planning with infrastructure decisions. Carol Rhea, the chair of the awards committee, called the growth plan both visionary and pragmatic. She went on to say that it provided a strategic, innovative and coordinated approach to sustainable growth and development. In other words, the growth plan was selected for meeting the awards criteria in an exemplary way, criteria like being original, innovative and progressive; having high-quality research and attention to detail; showing an effort in public engagement, participation and consultation.

We could not have done this alone, nor would we want to. We had the help and the input of literally thousands of citizens, stakeholders and experts. The process for developing this plan has been one of very careful consensus-building, drawing on internal and external planning expertise, with support coming from all sectors: municipalities, developers, environmentalists and, most importantly, residents in the communities of the greater Golden Horseshoe, all of whom I would say recognize the need for a big-picture plan and a strategy for growth.

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Thanks to all that work, we have an unprecedented consensus that Ontario will be more successful and prosperous by following a set of smart planning principles.

I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate everyone involved in creating this award-winning plan. Here today in the east gallery, in fact, we have several individuals, two of whom I'd like to acknowledge. One is my former chief of staff, Mr. Ross Parry, without whose help this plan would not have achieved what it did; also, assistant deputy minister Brad Graham, who leads the Ontario Growth Secretariat. Gentlemen, well done. We also have members of the Ontario Growth Secretariat, and I welcome you as well and thank you for your hard work and efforts in putting this plan together.

I think that Daniel Burnham, one of the most famous planners in the United States, would be proud of our effort. He said, "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood," and probably would not be realized anyway.

Our growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe will build opportunities for the people of Ontario by promoting economic prosperity and creating better-planned communities. It will help create complete communities with a greater mix of businesses, services, housing and parks that will make them more livable.

We're presenting better choices for a brighter future. Through the plan and our complementary initiatives, we will help ensure that Ontarians receive the communities that they want, that they deserve, and that they long to

leave for future generations. So please join me in celebrating Ontario's achievements.

BROADER PUBLIC SECTOR

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): For Ontario to be at its best, we need every Ontarian at his or her best. That's why we're making significant investments and improvements in the education, skills, health and competitiveness of Ontarians. This is essential to the future we all share.

Most of these services, as the members of the Legislature know, are actually delivered by what we call our transfer partners: schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and many others. It is essential that our partners, those who deliver these important public services, do so in a way that is effective, transparent and accountable.

As Minister of Government Services, I have been enormously impressed by the dedication of the hard-working people who make up our broader public service. However, the Auditor General's report has shown us that the professionalism displayed by so many must not blind us to the transgressions committed by some, or even the potential for such transgressions. The report highlights that some of our transfer partners are not following appropriate procurement and purchasing principles.

When you recognize that our transfer partners receive approximately \$60 billion in taxpayer money, we regard it as imperative that they have the appropriate procedures and accountability in place and that those procedures are followed. We all want to ensure that every dollar is used prudently and in a manner consistent with the public interest.

That is why, in 2004, our government made important changes to the Audit Act. It's why this Legislature gave the Auditor General—an officer of the Legislature, I might add—new powers to perform value-for-money audits not just of government ministries, but also of the broader public sector, including transfer partners such as hospitals, school boards and broader public sector organizations. It is why this government and this Legislature take seriously the recent recommendations from the auditor that the rules for some organizations must be more comprehensive and must be more rigorously applied.

We've instructed all of our deputy ministers to order all broader public service organizations to review their accountability standards and compliance mechanisms to ensure prudent and effective management of public funds. We are telling our partner organizations across the broader public sector that we expect these standards and the necessary controls will reflect current and best practices in public sector spending and will ensure transparency so as to withstand public scrutiny.

Letters urging these organizations to confirm that such standards are in place or to report what actions will be taken to ensure that they are in place have either been sent out or are in the process now of being sent out. We believe that the ultimate measure is the quality of the

public service for Ontarians. We all must make every effort to ensure that each step in the process that leads to service delivery is above board, above reproach and worthy of the people we are privileged to serve, the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Despite the rhetoric that we've heard from the Minister of Health today, this has been another very, very sad year for people in the province of Ontario when it comes to broken promises in health care. We know that the first thing this government did was introduce the health tax. At the same time as they introduced the health tax for people in this province, they decreased access; they eliminated public access to physiotherapy, to chiropractic services and optometry. In fact, they privatized those services, despite telling people they weren't going to do so and despite telling people they weren't going to introduce a health tax. I can go on and on.

If we take a look at access to doctors, they have simply not been able to deliver. There were 126 underserved areas in this province when they came into office; today we have about 138. The reality is that there are about 1.2 million people in this province without a family doctor. As far as the family health teams are concerned, they simply are not up and operational. When it comes to long-term care, there are about 35,000 people in this province who are forced to live in C and D beds, who do not have any privacy whatsoever, and this government refuses to develop a plan. They refuse to give those people living in long-term-care facilities the \$6,000 extra funding per year which they promised in order to ensure that there was more care provided for these individuals. The list goes on and on.

We have a broken promise as far as access to doctors. We have a broken promise in privatization, a broken promise to the people in long-term-care facilities. They said they were going to create these nursing positions. We now understand they're not going to be able to create the 8,000 nursing positions—another broken promise. Of course, recently we have seen that the LHINs are not making progress; they're making no decisions and costing taxpayers a lot of money.

GROWTH PLANNING

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): To my colleague and friend the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal we offer our congratulations on the win of the APA award for planning. In the spirit of the season, I wish the minister a happy Hanukkah as well, to enjoy the celebration. In that spirit, as we head to Christmas, I do want to say to the minister, who also has responsibility for the LCBO, if he is considering a Christmas gift for the MPP for Erie-Lincoln this year, please move forward on our VQA Wine Stores Act—it has passed second

reading and has gone through committee—which would open up a new channel for our VQA wines. Whether it's new locations or at casinos, farmers' markets—a great many opportunities for a new outlet. I say that to the minister.

I want to congratulate—it's good to see Ross back here again in the Legislature and the assistant deputy minister, Brad Graham, and Amy Tang, as well, responsible for this hard work. I did take the time to look up the American Planning Association's congratulations on this. They noted that the minister has been leading this effort since 2001. I want to congratulate the minister, because even when he was on the floor of the assembly as a Liberal, he was secretly helping out the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves governments, I guess, when this whole plan began. So I want to commend the minister, who obviously worked hand in hand with Minister Chris Hodgson and David Young as part of this process.

But in all seriousness, my commendations to the minister, his team and previous ministers who have brought this plan forward. The plan is important; getting through the jury and getting the thumbs up is important. I will remind the minister that American Idol's Ruben Studdard and Clay Aiken got the thumbs up from the jury, but after that performance, not so much. We want to make sure the minister follows through on the plan and performs. Projects like the mid-peninsula corridor, for example, have been long in delay. I know he's pushing the Minister of Transportation for that to move forward. I remind him of Fort Erie as well, cited for growth in his report, but then all of a sudden these new wetlands started popping up due to some work I'm concerned about with the MNR that wasn't groundproofed and has delayed that. But I know that the minister will carry through on his plan to make sure there are growth areas in Ontario and that infrastructure projects move forward.

I've run out of time to respond to the Minister of Government Services. I do want to point out that the cabinet spent some \$431 million in one last cabinet meeting and about \$3.5 million per minute in another. So when you hear the minister lecturing transfer partners about responsible spending and then you see this drunken sailor of a spending spree at the end of the year, they're pulling a McGuinty, saying one thing and doing another.

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Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I'm rising to speak to the whole matter of the award from the American Planning Association that the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal just spoke to. I have to say that this is a plan that I think looks much better from a distance than it does close up.

This is a plan about which the minister, when asked, cannot tell to what extent it will deal with the congestion and sprawl or congestion and gridlock problem we have in the GTA and the greater Golden Horseshoe. He cannot say to what extent this plan will be an improvement over business as usual. We have no idea whether there will be any improvement. If you actually look at closer-to-home think tanks, closer-to-home institutions and their com-

ments on the plan, they're not that glowing. The Neptis Foundation commented that the Liberals' final growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe includes a requirement that 40% of all new residential development must be constructed within built-up areas by 2015. When Neptis looked at that, they said that at this rate of intensification, there would not be a shift of new residential development from farmland to genuine intensification that would be sufficient to do what is needed to reduce gridlock and congestion. In other words, it looks nice from a distance, but in terms of those people who get to sit on the QEW or the 401 or Major Mackenzie Drive and dream about being at home, this isn't going to help them.

The Pembina Institute commented on and provided advice on this plan from its initial draft. They commented that while the initial draft was promising, the plan and subsequent drafts became mushier, mushier and mushier. It's very difficult to tell where this plan deviates from business as usual; again, business as usual meaning more congestion, more gridlock, more smog.

It's nice that the American Planning Association noticed Canada. It's unfortunate that they gave an award to a plan that actually did not get the review it should have gotten at home.

BROADER PUBLIC SECTOR

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I rise in response to the Minister of Government Services. I have to say it's very difficult to be supportive of an action which accomplishes so little.

I'd like to read exactly what I think is the ultimate paragraph here. It says, and I quote the minister, "Letters urging these organizations to confirm such standards are in place or to report what actions will be taken to ensure they are in place are in the process of being sent out." So in fact, all this announcement is is that they're about to send out some letters asking these government agencies to try to come up with a plan. That's all that's being announced here today. There is no reference to what will happen if these government agencies do not comply with the request. There is nothing here to say what will happen if there is weak compliance with the request. There is no reference at all to the actions primarily related to past abuses documented by the Auditor General and what this government is going to do about them.

Everyone who works in government must believe in the public service, as I most profoundly do, but the public service is only as good as the managers of the system. What we need from this government is to do something to change the corporate greed which was uncovered and the culture of entitlement which seemed to pervade some of these agencies. That's what we're asking the government to do, and it is not in this announcement.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In the short time that I have, I certainly hope Ontarians will contact this

government by e-mail, by the 1-800 line, by any mechanism they have to remind the Liberals of their broken health care promises.

For example, the promise that was made to enhance funding for residents of long-term-care homes by \$6,000: The government has only provided \$2,000. Where is the remaining \$4,000 in the fourth year of this Liberal government?

The promise that the government would reinstate a minimum of 2.25 hours of hands-on care per resident per day for each resident in a long-term-care home: That doesn't appear in Bill 140, the long-term-care bill. Where did that promise go?

The promise that this government made that they would only use public financing for hospital reconstruction and new hospitals: We now have private financing that is going to cost us oh, so much more.

I do hope people will contact the government and tell them to live up to the promises they made.

DEFERRED VOTES

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act / Projet de loi 173, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés et la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1416 to 1421.

The Speaker: Mrs. Bountrogianni has moved second reading of Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Jeffrey, Linda	Patten, Richard
Arthurs, Wayne	Klees, Frank	Peters, Steve
Balkissoon, Bas	Kular, Kuldip	Phillips, Gerry
Barrett, Toby	Kwinter, Monte	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Leal, Jeff	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Levac, Dave	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	MacLeod, Lisa	Ramsay, David
Bountrogianni, Marie	Marsales, Judy	Runciman, Robert W.
Bradley, James J.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Ruprecht, Tony
Broten, Laurel C.	Matthews, Deborah	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Mauro, Bill	Scott, Laurie
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McGuinty, Dalton	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	McMeekin, Ted	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Dhillon, Vic	Miller, Norm	Takhar, Harinder S.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Millroy, John	Tory, John

Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Duncan, Dwight	Murdoch, Bill	Wilson, Jim
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	O'Toole, John	Witmer, Elizabeth
Fonseca, Peter	Oraziotti, David	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Gerretsen, John	Quellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Tabuns, Peter
Hampton, Howard	Martel, Shelley	

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 72; the nays are 8.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I refer the bill to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The bill is referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like unanimous consent to deliver this food to the Premier. It was given to me today by celebrity chefs here in Toronto; Jamie Kennedy was one of them. This has been made from raw—

Interjection: No.

Mr. Murdoch: Oh, you don't want us to give it to your Premier.

The Speaker: Mr. Murdoch has asked for unanimous consent. Agreed? No. I heard a no.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. For about a week now we've been asking you to apologize for your wait times television ad, which was found by the advertising standards council to be "inaccurate" because it left people with the impression that "wait times for all ... procedures have already been reduced" and "that Ontarians are now spending less time" waiting.

You said yesterday that you're going to "make sure that the people of Ontario continue to see that their wait times are in fact coming down." But let's see what Ontarians really find if they look at the website—and this is putting aside for a moment that the numbers there are under suspicion because of the Auditor General's findings. Since August and September 2005, wait times for cancer surgery are up 10% at North York General Hospital, 15% in Markham, 51% at the Southlake hospital, 62% at the Credit Valley Hospital, 139% at

Montfort Hospital and 350% at Bluewater Health in Sarnia.

All over the province we have these wait times for cancer going up. Don't you think it's time for you to apologize? Will you do so, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): It is absolutely true that we have some real challenges with respect to our cancer procedure wait times. But we're proud of the fact that we're making that information public for the very first time in the history of this province. The fact of the matter is that cancer surgery wait times are up overall by 6.2%, but I should say that 89% of cancer surgeries are now completed within the access target timeline.

In all the other areas which the leader of the official opposition is reluctant to mention, whether you're talking about angiography, angioplasty, cataract surgery, hip replacements, knee replacements, MRIs or CTs, those wait times are down.

Mr. Tory: Again, putting aside the fact that the very wait times website that you talk about and that you said you made available has been found to be misleading and should be taken with a grain of salt by none other than the Auditor General of Ontario, the Premier mentions cataracts. Let's look at cataracts. Wait times are up 13% at Rouge Valley, 15% at Montfort, 16% in Woodstock and 92% in the Niagara Health System. That's the story. There are some examples on cataracts where the wait times are up. You just finished telling this House and the people of Ontario that the wait times are down for cataracts. People are waiting longer.

Yesterday, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record called for an apology. Today the London Free Press said that your ads are "hard to swallow" and that this whole saga "certainly looks suspicious." We agree with the Auditor General; we agree with the Kitchener-Waterloo Record; we agree with the London Free Press and the advertising standards council. Will you retract these ads and apologize for what you've done in terms of this inaccurate information?

1430

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader is saying that Ontarians shouldn't trust the website, but he's using that to source his information that he's deploying in this House today. I want to congratulate the leader of the official opposition for accessing the website. We've had 2.1 million-plus hits on that website so far.

When the leader of the official opposition references that some cataract surgery times have gone up in some hospitals, he's absolutely right. But overall, in Ontario, cataract surgery times are down by 27.7%. And the reason for making this information public at all our hospitals was so that Ontarians could look at that and ask themselves and ask their family doctor whether or not they want to go to that hospital or whether or not they might want to go to another one which is offering faster service. That's the whole idea behind making this information public to the people of Ontario for the first time.

Mr. Tory: I don't know how the Premier can get up and talk with such pride about the fact that 2.1 million people have been exposed to data that the Auditor General said was misleading. The fact is, when Mr. Kirby reports and what the Auditor General is saying, that the numbers aren't going to get better when you figure them out properly, they're going to get worse. I'm happy to stand and say that this is the best-case scenario that anybody is going to see in Ontario. So that's why you should apologize for the ads and apologize for the website.

Let's look at MRIs: the waiting time is up 20% at the Lakeridge hospital; up 27% in London; up 44% at Rouge Valley; up 86% at Joseph Brant; up 122% in Timmins; up 136% at St. Joe's in Toronto; and up a whopping 238% at the Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital. In community after community, you cannot support the claims you made in your television commercials.

I'm asking you simply to stand up and apologize for the fact that you ran these inaccurate ads that are not reflective of the facts being experienced by people in this province. Why won't you do it?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition is plain wrong. The fact of the matter is that wait times are coming down in the province. The fact of the matter is that we have collected information that was never collected in the past. We relied on expert medical advice in terms of the best way to present that information to the people of Ontario.

The Provincial Auditor tells us he takes issue with that; we're going to pay very careful attention to that. We've asked Senator Kirby to get himself involved in this and help us to reconcile the conflicting expert advice we got from the Provincial Auditor and our medical experts.

But the fact of the matter is this: Wait times are coming down in the province of Ontario. Angiography is coming down by 39%; angioplasty by 17.9%; cataract surgery is down overall by 28%; hip replacements by 20%; knee replacements by 20%; MRIs down by 13%. The Minister of Health announced just yesterday the opening of two more new MRIs in Ontario. We're moving ahead. We'll keep moving ahead, and we'll keep getting wait times down.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Tory: A new question for the Premier. Again, he says, "We'll keep getting wait times down." Let's take a look at CT scan wait times: up 15% in London; up 18% in Thunder Bay; up 23% at Rouge Valley; up 23% at Sunnybrook; up 25% at Joseph Brant; up 27% at Lakeridge; up 41% in Halton; up 41% in North York; up 61% in Scarborough; up 74% at Grand River hospital. One more priority procedure where the wait times are going up all over the province, one more reason why you should be apologizing to the people of Ontario for putting this information on the website, which the Auditor General himself said was misleading.

Why won't you simply admit you were wrong and do what the Kitchener-Waterloo Record called on you to do, which is to apologize for running these inaccurate ads and running this information on your website that the Auditor General says is misleading? Why not just apologize? Stand up and do it.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to thank the leader of the official opposition. If he hasn't done so, I would strongly recommend that he personally visit that website and join the 2.1 million Ontarians who have done so.

Now, it's all fine and dandy for the leader to stand up and reference 10 or a dozen hospitals, but there are close to 160 in the province. Why doesn't he stand up and list the figures for each and every one of those hospitals? Because he would see, if he did that, the fact of the matter is, in every area, overall, wait times are coming down, except in cancer. I acknowledge that we've got more work to do there, specifically for cancer surgeries. But overall, wait times are coming down.

Mr. Tory: We have just provided evidence of the fact that the McGuinty Liberals, today and every other day, with the ads and with the website, are trying to bamboozle the voters, and they're not willing to say they're sorry for trying to bamboozle the voters. It happened in the election campaign big time, and now it's happening again.

Let's go on. The Premier mentioned hip replacement wait times. Hip replacements are up 9% in Quinte, up 17% at the Toronto East General Hospital, up 22% in Stratford, up 24% at the Montfort, up 26% in Chatham and up 31% in North York. In Timmins the waiting time is up 51%, up 54% at York Central and up 60% in Sault Ste. Marie, and the list goes on.

Once again, Premier, my question is: In view of this utter failure, in view of the information that the Auditor General says is misleading, the ads that have been found to be inaccurate, why won't you apologize and admit that you've tried yet again to bamboozle the voters, as you've tried to do so many times before?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: What the leader of the official opposition is doing is, frankly, unbecoming. He is cherry-picking specific data from our website, a website which he tells us he does not trust. Although there are close to 160 hospitals in Ontario, he's very selectively choosing hospitals—which exist; we made that public—where we still have challenges with some of these wait times. But the fact of the matter is that, overall, wait times are coming down, whether you're talking about angiographies, angioplasties, cataract surgeries, hip replacements, knee replacements, MRIs or CT scans. In all those areas, overall, wait times are coming down.

Mr. Tory: The fact of the matter is that these are real hospitals that we're naming, affecting real people who are waiting for real procedures. And we'll have more tomorrow. We haven't even begun to touch on the subject of all the procedures that are not on your list, that are not being reported, where people are waiting a long, long time across the province.

Let's just deal with knee replacements: wait times up 8% at William Osler, up 10% at Toronto East General, up 14% in St. Thomas, up 23% at Southlake, up 25% at York Central, up 34% at Hotel-Dieu Grace, up 37% at Montfort, up 89% in Cornwall and up 52% in Chatham.

Your ads were found to be inaccurate. Your information on the website was found by the Auditor General to be misleading. You should stand in your place and apologize for the fact that you have tried to fool the voters of Ontario on this important matter that affects their health.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I say to the leader of the official opposition that this idiosyncratic perspective on the numbers that are being made available in Ontario for the very first time is unbecoming, because I expected more of the leader of the official opposition than to present numbers in such a way that contrast those cases where there is still more work to be done with the overwhelming majority of cases where we are enjoying success. The fact is, we have invested \$600 million to purchase 657,000 additional procedures. That's why wait times are coming down in Ontario.

I would ask Ontarians to consider our investment of \$600 million, specific to buying 657,000 more procedures, with the leader of the official opposition's determination to take \$2.5 billion out of our health care system. I ask them to ask themselves: What is that going to do to wait times in Ontario when you take \$2.5 billion out of our health care system?

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Premier, on November 22, your Minister of Natural Resources said that Ontario's forest sector "has gotten off relatively scot-free from the downturn in the US housing sector." Since his comment, Tembec announced the permanent closure of its sawmill in Timmins—140 jobs destroyed; Domtar announced the closure of its sawmill in Nairn Centre—140 jobs destroyed; Bowater announced the permanent closure of its Ignace sawmill—60 jobs destroyed; and Buchanan announced the layoff of everybody at its three Thunder Bay sawmills—more than 600 jobs.

My question is this: When did the layoff of more than 1,000 forest sector workers in northern Ontario just before Christmas become "getting off scot-free" for the McGuinty government?

1440

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Especially at this time of the year, I really feel for the families and the workers who have been impacted by the collapse of the softwood lumber industry, primarily brought on by the collapse of the American housing industry. There are over 700,000 newly built homes in the United States that

remain unsold, and so demand for housing in the United States has crashed. At the beginning of this, Ontario was not impacted as much as was Quebec, where at that time, when I made those statements, they had a 50% loss in their industry. We are starting to feel it at this time, as the shipments to the United States continue to decline. It's very sad for the northern Ontario economy.

Mr. Hampton: I'm sure those 1,000 workers who will not have a paycheque at Christmas will appreciate knowing that the McGuinty government feels their pain.

Premier, your Minister of Natural Resources also said, and I want to quote him, about the softwood lumber agreement, "I do support it. I think it's a good deal for Ontario." Yesterday, when Bowater announced the permanent closure of the Ignace sawmill and the destruction of 60 jobs in a small town, he said, "The softwood lumber agreement reduced quotas and that is the reason for the closure of this sawmill." My question is this, Premier: Can you tell the people at Ignace how the destruction of more than 60 jobs in a small, one-industry town was a good deal for them?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The Bowater company was particularly hard hit by this because the way the agreement worked, quota was to be distributed based on a record of export over the last five years. Ignace production was not very consistent over that time, and their Fort William operation on the Fort William reserve only got up and running a couple of years ago and took a while to ramp up. So they didn't have a very strong export record and therefore came out at the short end on the quota, unlike some of the other companies that had a consistent export record over five years. They had much more quota than the Bowater company does, and that's obviously very sad for the workers who work for that company.

Mr. Hampton: I guess we can take it from that answer that the McGuinty government still thinks this is a good deal.

Premier, in February of this year, your Minister of Natural Resources said that the forest sector in northern Ontario is beginning to turn a corner. Since that statement, more than 2,000 forest sector workers in northern Ontario have had their jobs destroyed as a result of the McGuinty government's misguided policy of driving hydro rates through the roof and your too little, too late changes to forest policy. I want to ask this question: When did the destruction of a further 2,000 forest sector jobs in northern Ontario under the McGuinty government become "turning the corner" for the forest industry?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The initiatives that the Premier and I have announced over the last 18 months have made Ontario one of the more competitive jurisdictions in Canada when it comes to all of the forestry sector, especially the softwood lumber sector, as we have taken over complete payment for all road construction and maintenance. We've given some stumpage relief, and of course we have our prosperity program where we are incenting the companies to become more efficient. They are applying to those programs, and we're moving ahead with that.

We are in a cyclical housing down. That happens in the United States from time to time, and that does hurt us. But the member will know that that housing market in the United States will rebound, and that means that our sawmilling industry will rebound. Unlike Quebec, which didn't put the programs in before the softwood lumber agreement, Ontario will be in a very good position when that happens.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Minister of Natural Resources: The Minister of Natural Resources says, "a very good position." Here's the reality: 45,000 jobs have been destroyed, and the McGuinty government calls that a good position. That's 45,000 working families without a paycheque at Christmas.

At the same time, you just voted for a \$40,000 pay increase for yourself. I want to ask you this, Minister: Are you going to tell those 45,000 working families who do not have a paycheque at Christmas that you really deserve a \$40,000 pay raise?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I would certainly take issue with not only the description of these jobs being totally destroyed and the number with the honourable member across the way. I just said to him in the last response, and he knows this very well, that at least 60% of the softwood lumber produced in Ontario goes to the United States as an export market. We know we have a cyclical market situation there, but that will rebound. So those jobs are not here today, and we are sorry that we have those layoffs, but we have very efficient mills.

We have the timber resources, unlike Quebec, which has to claw back their timber resources, because we've managed our forests very well. We have everything there, when this market rebounds, to get those jobs back, and those jobs will come back.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, here are some casualties in the McGuinty government's misguided too little, too late changes to forest policy and your completely misguided policy of driving hydro rates through the roof.

I'll start with Thunder Bay: Cascades paper mill—375 jobs destroyed; the Bowater kraft pulp mill—250 jobs permanently destroyed; one Bowater paper machine—140 jobs destroyed; the Smurfit-Stone containerboard mill—over 100 jobs destroyed. Add it all up and it's 825 jobs destroyed; 825 families without a paycheque at Christmas.

We just saw you vote for a big pay increase for yourself. Can you look those people in the eye and tell them that after all of these jobs were destroyed under your watch, you deserve a \$40,000 pay increase?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I can look those people in the eye and say to them that my Premier, Premier McGuinty, my ministry and all my colleagues on this side of the House have worked very hard, have dedicated a lot of time and have presented a very good package for the forestry industry that is absolutely unprecedented in the history of this country. No province or national government has brought forward a policy, a package of incentives and

assistance, as the McGuinty government has. The people of northern Ontario know that, and we are working through that, and we're there with them through these tough times.

They are tough times. In fact, it is a crisis there; there's no doubt about it. But a government that acts in crisis and works with the people affected is what really counts, and we're there with the people of northern Ontario and the forestry industry.

Mr. Hampton: Red Rock, the closure of the Norampac containerboard plant—300 permanent jobs destroyed; Dryden, where Weyerhaeuser closed its sawmill and shut down a paper mill—385 permanent jobs destroyed; Smooth Rock Falls, where you're going to let the corporation keep the hydro dam and profit by selling electricity, but you're okay with 250 jobs destroyed there; Espanola—120 jobs destroyed there.

It seems that every time you trot out another part of your government's PR campaign, which has done nothing to sustain jobs, which has done nothing to prevent the destruction of jobs in the forest sector, every time you trot out another PR announcement, another 300 or 400 layoffs result.

I'm going to ask the minister again—45,000 jobs destroyed in the forest sector over the last three years under your watch: Can you honestly tell those 45,000 people that you deserve a \$40,000 pay increase?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: The leader of the third party may wish he had a magic wand and he could make all of this better. We in government have to do it step by step, working with the industry and getting the right inputs in place to make sure that they are competitive.

What the member fails to say is that we have helped reopen the Neenah Paper mill in Terrace Bay and got those jobs back. So there's a reopening. We're working with a new set of investors who want to reopen the Cascades plant in Thunder Bay, and we're very close to seeing that happen. I would hope you'll have that announcement in the new year.

We are starting to make some progress. It's not all doom and gloom, though it is bad news up there. We are working with the communities, we're working with the companies and we're working with the industry to make sure we have a strong, competitive industry in northern Ontario and therefore sustainable communities in northern Ontario.

1450

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is to the Minister of Health. Minister, on November 20, you stood in this House and responded to me when I asked you why your government was discriminating against federal pensioners and creating a second class of citizens in the province of Ontario when it comes to drug coverage. You said that you were going to go ahead with that policy for retired federal public servants because you were going to save tens of millions of dol-

lars which you could use to improve access to drugs for others.

A few weeks later, on December 8, your Premier wrote a letter to the president of the Federal Superannuates National Association, stating that, "We have decided not to move forward with the policy."

Minister, who is in charge at the Ministry of Health?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Oh, it's still you.

I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I want to say that it's an appropriate day for the question because today is the day when we put out a new formulary in the province of Ontario. I'm very pleased to report to the people of Ontario, through our initiatives in Bill 102, that 23 new brand name drug products are being added to the Ontario government's drug formulary today.

On the issue that is mentioned, some shenanigans have occurred on the part of the federal Treasury Board which have caused an exacerbated degree of fear among federal pensioners. We're very honest about it. This is the circumstance that has occurred. The honourable member will know, accordingly, that our government has very clearly announced, through the leader of our government, the Premier of Ontario, that we will not be moving forward with this initiative. That's the final word on that.

Mrs. Witmer: To the minister again: It's obvious that this Bill 102 that was introduced to supposedly expand access to drugs for people in Ontario continues to be as flawed as it ever was. You did no consultation, you did absolutely no analysis, and then you find out after the fact how it's negatively going to impact people. In fact, everybody has told you—the pharmacists, the drug companies, the researchers—that this drug bill was flawed from day one.

You've lost \$14 million in savings; you're now going to lose another \$100 million in savings. This was supposedly the reason for the bill. I guess I would say to you today, Minister, where are you going to find the savings that you said you were going to provide to patients? They were counting on the money in order to have better access to drugs.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Firstly, the honourable member who asked the question is not straightforward enough to acknowledge that her foundation for asking the question is that she's on the side of a party that proposes a \$2.5-billion cut to health care. So if the question is to be asked about where such savings are—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): That's not true.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You're not even in your seat. If the question is to be asked on the basis of where savings will be found, then it really is the honourable member who's on the hot seat on that one. She and her teammate there have got a cut of \$2.5 billion proposed for health care.

The reality is that through the initiatives associated with Bill 102, we've reduced the impact on the treasury by a couple of hundred million dollars. But way more

importantly than that, far more importantly than that, we stand today as a government proud of the initiatives related to Bill 102, which have meant that 23—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: He's not in his seat, Mr. Speaker—new brand name drugs have been added today to the Ontario drug formulary.

SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS CENTRES

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question's for the minister responsible for women's issues. On December 31, the Sexual Assault Care Centre in Scarborough will face dramatic cuts in its ability to serve women immediately after they are raped and sexually assaulted. Essential members of the sexual assault health support team will no longer be available to provide medically necessary services to women in crisis. You are the minister responsible for women's issues in this province. Why are you allowing this to happen under your watch?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): I'd be happy to refer the second question to our Attorney General, if it is related to a sexual assault crisis centre. As the member opposite knows, funding for those centres does go through the Attorney General.

Let me just say this, though: This member comes to the House today to ask a question and purports to be helpful to women's issues and all of those agencies that work so hard. This is the same member who does not acknowledge that as of today we have moved from introducing a \$66-million domestic violence action plan to delivering an \$82-million domestic violence action plan. But what is more important is that this same member has voted against every single opportunity to improve the lives of women, and I find that very hard to square with asking about an initiative to fund—for the first time, those sexual assault crisis centres received more money. They have not had that happen in the last 15 years. That happened under this government—not the NDP government, but under this government.

Ms. Horwath: Not surprisingly, the minister hasn't addressed my question. Dr. Rosalind Zucker and her colleagues are on call at night and on weekends, when raped and sexually assaulted women need care. She wrote to the McGuinty Liberals months ago because the on-call funding was being cut by you—not by anybody else, but by you, crippling this crucial community resource. Yesterday your government refused to help and, in fact, told Dr. Zucker to wait until 2008.

Minister, women in east Toronto and Scarborough can't wait until 2008. These cuts are happening now. Will you take action today and stop the cuts before December 31?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I am happy to follow up with this particular crisis centre on a personal level and not address it here in this House. But let me say again what I

have said before. I'd like you to go to the Ontario Women's Directorate website. On that website you will find, in very short order, this particular update of the domestic violence action plan. It is unprecedented, in the history of the Ontario government, the level to which this government has brought together 13 ministers, 13 ministries to help the plight of women who suffer abuse. In an unprecedented way, we have come to the table, not just with funding but with structure so that these agencies have never seen the level of support that they are now getting from this government, not just in the area of sexual assault crisis centres but community supports across the board: in training, in the justice sector and, special and most of all, in public education. It is critical that we have support from all members of this House—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, two weeks ago my private member's bill, Bill 161, the protecting vulnerable workers act, 2006, was debated in this Legislature. I am proud to say that my bill passed second reading. As you know, this issue is very near and dear to me and is one that affects a great many of my constituents in Brampton West–Mississauga. In fact, this issue affects Ontarians throughout the province, particularly some of our most vulnerable workers, including women, immigrants and visible minorities.

The purpose of my bill is to establish a licensing scheme for the control and regulation of businesses that operate as employment agencies. While there are many reputable temporary staffing agencies that play a useful role in our economy, there is no doubt that there are some breaking the rules and causing undue hardship for some of our most vulnerable citizens. Minister, what are you doing to protect these vulnerable individuals from exploitation by unethical staffing agencies?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I want to thank the member for his question and his advocacy on behalf of his constituents and, as well, his advocacy on behalf of vulnerable workers in the province. His bill raises some very interesting initiatives, and as a ministry we are taking a look at that bill. Also, we're continually looking at ways to address the issues and the challenges facing temporary workers in this province. I do want to stress, however, that temporary workers are currently protected under the Employment Standards Act. Their work may be temporary but their rights are not.

I can also tell you that the Ministry of Labour has had closer scrutiny of temporary agencies this past year. I am pleased today to announce that I have directed Ministry of Labour staff to undertake a targeted inspection campaign focused on temporary work agencies. Beginning in January, a group of employment standards officers will dedicate themselves exclusively to proactively inspecting temporary agencies. The officers will check to ensure

that employers are following the rules, including paying appropriate wages—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary, the member for Mississauga East.

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Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): That's great news. It's good to hear that this government takes the concerns of our vulnerable workers so seriously. I know that many of my constituents will breathe a sigh of relief knowing that the Ministry of Labour is taking action against these unscrupulous employers who prey on the weakest in our society.

While I still believe this industry needs to be regulated to fill the void left after the Conservative government chose to repeal the Employment Agencies Act, this is a fine step forward. It's no secret that women, newcomers and visible minorities are excessively represented in the lowest-paying and most insecure forms of work. They need our protection. But we're dealing with two issues here. One is compliance with the act by uncooperative employers, which I am hopeful your dedicated inspection team can improve, and one is education: How do we inform our vulnerable workers of their rights? Many are newcomers to Ontario. Minister, what—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Peters: I want to thank the member for his question, and his advocacy as well. Over the past three months, my parliamentary assistant, Mario Racco, has been touring around the province, meeting with community groups and newcomers, so that people understand their rights in the workplace. As well, we've developed community partnerships such as the Centre for Information and Community Services. We've launched a two-year partnership with the Settlement and Integration Services Organization in Hamilton, where counsellors and staff are trained to explain workers' rights in 40 different languages. Recently we partnered with the Chinese Inter-agency Network to help obtain valuable information from front-line temporary workers to assist our targeted enforcement. As well, we're offering outreach through the Ministry of Labour staff. We've entered into partnerships with three GTA community colleges to help employers understand compliance with the ESA. We have a website available as well, and we've moved forward with dedicated inspection.

In two years, the team recovered \$3.2 million in wages. The team beat targets for the last two years: 2,300 inspections in 2004-05; 2,560 in 2005-06. Again, our Ministry of Labour staff will undertake a targeted inspection campaign focused on temporary work agencies—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

SEX OFFENDERS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): My question is for the Attorney General. Although Christmas and the holidays are just around the corner and I'm wearing a Christmas tie, all isn't quite as well as everybody thinks

it is. You see, I was in a classroom yesterday at Adelaide McLaughlin school and last Friday I was in O'Neill Collegiate, and there are a lot of concerns. The students are concerned; the teachers are concerned; the parents are concerned. They're coming to me in the arenas, because something is taking place that I think some people would like to hear about. You see, within half a block or within walking distance of those schools I was at, Jamie Moorcroft has been released. And just for those who would like to know—or not like to know—he has 10 criminal convictions, four of them against young boys. This man was convicted and released on house arrest for nine months.

Attorney General, people want to know, how are you protecting the people of the province and the kids by allowing individuals like that to be released in our community?

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I thank the member for his question, and I appreciate that he's bringing an issue to this Legislature that's very important to his community. I understand that and I appreciate it.

The member will understand as well that it is not for a Legislature to be making decisions about facts and law that are presented before a court. It is for a Legislature, on the other hand, to bring forward reforms, as this government has brought forward and as this government has brought forward to the federal Parliament, to make the changes that are necessary, without getting into this particular case, to see to it that if there are injustices out there that you and your community want changed, we do that.

I will certainly undertake to sit down with the member and with the official opposition to talk about what those reforms might be in the case of the particular area that the member is raising.

Mr. Ouellette: To quote here from CityNews, "Cops are sure he's a candidate to re-offend." There's nothing they can do about it at this time. Let me restate that: 10 convictions, four of them against young boys; nine months' house arrest. Something has to be done. If this Legislature has to come together to deal with issues like that, let us know what we have to do to make those changes, because we can't have things like this. I can't have my kids coming home from school with papers saying, "Guess what? This guy's on"—people want to know that he's living on Fernhill Boulevard, just north of Rosalind, but the police can't tell them that. I just did. We need those individuals out there addressed. We need this Legislature to come together to make those necessary changes. What is it that we have to do to work together to move forward on that issue?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: I hope the member appreciates how inappropriate it would be for an Attorney General, for a chief legal officer, to comment on any particular case or any particular individual. I know he understands that.

I have undertaken to sit down with the member, with the official opposition and with the third party to discuss reforms. It is very clear that there is a level of govern-

ment in which reforms are taken, the federal Parliament, which is not to say that we can't have a role in making those changes. The Premier led the national fight to make changes that resulted in reverse onus on bail going before the federal Parliament. We can work together on not only that issue but on other issues. I've undertaken to sit down with the member and I look forward to sitting down with him, after I've answered this question, to arrange for a time for us to begin that hard work.

LANDFILL

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. This morning, residents of Tiny township's Stop Dump Site 41 campaign travelled here to request that the McGuinty government reconsider approvals for a garbage dump on top of some of the purest source waters not just in the province but on the planet. The McGuinty government is being asked if it will walk the walk when it comes to protecting source waters. Will the McGuinty government protect these pristine source waters and reconsider the EA approval for site 41 under section 11.4 of the Environmental Assessment Act?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I would ask my friend opposite to really pay attention to the history of what has transpired with respect to site 41. We are the government that has taken the single largest step in all of the country to protect source water with the Clean Water Act. That was an act that you voted against.

The environmental assessment for the landfill, which the member now speaks about, was originally approved under the NDP government some 10 years ago, and processes have been undertaken in that community over many years. The conditions on the certificate of approval were approved under the former Tory government. The role that the Ministry of the Environment now plays is solely to examine the design and operation of that landfill being sought to be constructed by the municipality in Tiny township. So before my friend opposite points fingers across—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Tabuns: It's nice to know that the day after your government passed your Clean Water Act, you issued the provisional certificate of approval for site 41. The act that you proclaim—acclaim—is not applied to a situation where we have source waters that actually have to be protected. This water is so clean that researchers use it to look at contamination in bottled water.

Now that we've gotten through all the rhetoric, will you use your powers as the government of the day to reconsider the EA approval for site 41 under section 11.4 of the Environmental Assessment Act, or will you ignore your actions on source water protection?

Hon. Ms. Broten: As I've suggested to my friend opposite, it is imperative that he examine the history of what has transpired here: a full hearing before the

Environmental Review Tribunal and a full examination of the issues by the government of the day, which was your government, an NDP government; approval of a full environmental assessment; provision of a certificate of approval; and an examination at present day by the community seeking to build their landfill, with the role of the ministry being to ensure that that community will be safe and protected.

The ministry has set out incredibly tough conditions to ensure that the landfill will be constructed using state-of-the-art engineering techniques that continue to exist, and we have put in place mechanisms to ensure that there's an opportunity for the community to continue to work collaboratively with respect to ensuring the safety of their drinking water. That is something I am committed to as a minister who brought in and passed the Clean Water Act. We will ensure that the source water in this community is clean and safe.

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IMMIGRANT SERVICES

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. From 2003 to 2005, over 24,000 newcomers chose to settle in the city of Brampton. That's an average of 8,000 newcomers a year.

Minister, recently you were at the Brampton Multicultural Community Centre to announce an investment that is a result of the first-ever Canada-Ontario immigration agreement that the McGuinty government signed over a year ago.

"The immigrant community in Brampton and Mississauga has grown by leaps and bounds, but their needs were not reflected in the settlement resources we'd received over the years," said Ahmed Iqbal in the Toronto Star.

The centre is expected to get \$989,000 to strengthen language programs and hire job developers and counsellors, roles that fell to volunteers.

Minister, does this announcement mark the fact that a significant amount of funding is starting to flow to service agencies from the agreement?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I want to thank the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale. For the last two years, he's been asking the federal government to ensure that an immigrant who goes to Malton gets the same funding as an immigrant who goes to Montreal. We signed that agreement, and now that money's flowing.

In Brampton, we just announced almost \$1 million for the new settlement services that go into the schools now, enhanced language training and job search workshops. They're hiring more people. This is the first time in over 20 years there's been an increase in funding for settlement services. There are more programs and more experts going in there, helping newcomers integrate. It's good news for Brampton, it's good news for Peel region and it's good news for Ontario.

Mr. Kular: Minister, the federal-provincial agreement is only one of the initiatives in the McGuinty government's comprehensive plan to break down barriers for newcomers. Recently, you also announced the opening of Global Experience Ontario, an access and resource centre for the internationally trained, a result of the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act that passed recently. Minister, how will this centre help newcomers break down the barriers they are faced with when they arrive in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Colle: I was proud, along with Minister Smitherman, to open up Global Experience Ontario at Ryerson University. At Ryerson University, there's going to be a one-stop information resource centre for newcomers to link with our bridge training programs, to link with services that will help them break through the barriers. This is the first centre of its kind. It's an investment in people who have global experience.

Frankly, many of us are sick and tired of hearing that excuse about, "Sorry, no job. You don't have any Canadian experience." What we're asking employers and regulatory bodies to do is look at people's global experience, international experience. That's why this centre will do a great job in ensuring qualified people get the right information and the right support to practise in Ontario. Whether it be doctors, engineers or pharmacists, these people deserve a chance. The access centre, Global Experience Ontario, will give them that chance and the support they've been long waiting for. It's about time.

SIGN LANGUAGE IN SCHOOLS

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): My question is to the Premier. Today in the gallery we have former MPP Gary Malkowski, and with him several representatives from the Ontario Association of the Deaf, the Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf as well as the Canadian Hearing Society.

As you know, Premier, American sign language along with English and French are all recognized as languages of instruction under the Education Act. The act also develops the regulations for the use of American sign language and LSQ. Can you tell Mr. Malkowski and the representatives mentioned who are here today what the status is and why there has been little or no action from your government on developing and implementing regulations on ASL and LSQ under the Education Act?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Thank you very much for the question. The member should know that since I was parliamentary assistant, actually, to Minister Kennedy, we have been in conversation with the folks who are concerned about this, because there's a range of issues here in terms of language of instruction and exactly what the regulation should say. I will commit to the member that we will

continue to have that conversation with Gary Malkowski and the people who have been in communication with us.

Ms. Scott: Thank you, Minister, but there have been many consultations. It's gone on for a long time. The president of the Ontario Association of the Deaf, as recently as October of this year, clearly stated that most deaf students do not pass the standard grade 10 literacy test. That's a pretty woeful statistic from a minister in a government where the leader proclaims himself as the education Premier.

You know you have the power to implement action if you so choose. Regulations have been created governing the other languages of instruction. You know you can pass regulations under the Education Act. Numerous studies, including the recent Ontario Human Rights Commission's Guidelines on Accessible Education, November 2004, and the recent federal court's Canadian Association of the Deaf decision, August 2006, recognize that action is needed.

Please, Minister, why are you avoiding the implementation of ASL and LSQ regulations in schools across Ontario? You have the ability to do so. Will you commit today to a timeline, please?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: First of all, action on enactment of this regulation could have taken place under the previous government; it did not. Eight years it sat. What we're trying to do in the education system, in addition to putting extra resources into the post-secondary system for interpretation, is build capacity. Gary Malkowski and I have had many conversations about this, that what is really needed is capacity in the system.

The member opposite makes a gesture that suggests we're not doing anything. In fact, what we're doing is working with our teachers of the deaf. We're working with the school system as a whole to make sure that the professional development and the training is in place that will allow capacity in the system. We can pass a regulation, we can change a regulation, but if there is no capacity, if there are no teachers to deliver, if there is no way for students to get the service they need, then the regulation is meaningless. So we're going to build capacity rather than make a paper decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question as well is to the Minister of Education, and it's on exactly the same topic. In addition to English and French, American sign language—ASL—and langue des signes québécois are recognized and accepted as languages of instruction under the Education Act. People have the exact same right to sign in American sign language and LSQ as they have to speak English or French. Despite this, there is no action in the development of regulations for minimum standards for the classrooms of the deaf and the hard of hearing.

You're into the fourth year of your mandate. Can you tell us why your ministry has yet to develop and implement ASL and LSQ regulations under the Education Act? Why haven't you done it in four years?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Not only did the previous government not enact this regulation, this regulation could have been enacted by the government preceding the previous government. This issue has been around for a good 14 years.

We are working with the deaf community. We have had many conversations with Mr. Malkowski. In fact, various wordings of a regulation change have been drafted and there has been a very specific conversation about what we can and can't do. If this were a simple issue of changing a regulation and making it so that all students who need ASL would have access to it, it would have been done. The point is that capacity has to be built in the system to allow students to get the service they need, and that's what we're working on.

Mr. Prue: We're having conversations. The answer we want to hear, and I'm sure that the people here want to hear, is that we're taking action. That's what you're not doing.

The recommendations for development of these regulations were supported by all the former ministers. I wasn't here and you weren't either. I don't know why they weren't done, but you have the opportunity to do them. They are being supported by the Ontario College of Teachers, and even the Supreme Court of Canada has said that it needs to be done.

You have delayed developing and implementing the ASL/LSQ regulations that would ensure those minimum standards for sign language interpreters and teaching schools across Ontario, despite your so-called commitment to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. It was in there too. Minister, when will you commit to ensuring that deaf students in Ontario are ensured quality instruction in their officially recognized language of instruction, that is, ASL/LSQ, in Ontario?

1520

Hon. Ms. Wynne: What was in the AODA was the commitment to set standards. That process is in the works. What we are trying to do is to build capacity in the system. We're trying to train teachers, we're trying to make sure that the services for deaf students are in place. It is very cheap politics to suggest that just changing a regulation and demanding that something happen in a system that has no capacity to make that happen—it's dishonest. I am not prepared to be part of a government that would do such a thing.

What I believe is that we have to keep making investments in the system that allow the teachers to get the training that they need, that allow us to have the capacity to deliver the service to the children. At the post-secondary level, we are making investments that will provide for access. We are working on the regulation changes. Mr. Malkowski couldn't get a meeting with the previous government; couldn't get a meeting, didn't have a conversation. We're working on drafting a regulation and building capacity.

TOURISM

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): My question is for everybody's favourite minister, the Minister of Tourism. Minister, the tourism industry has been facing some tough times in the past few years. What with September 11, SARS, the high dollar, high gasoline prices and the proposed passport policy in the United States, they've all had an impact on the tourism industry in Ontario.

Minister, I recall last summer that our government invested in the Chinese Lantern Festival at Ontario Place and that it was a great success. In my riding of Essex, there are many great festivals and events, not the least of which is the international wine festival in Amherstburg. Minister, what are some of the ways that our government is encouraging people to attend all of these great festivals and events happening across our great province?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I thank you very much for the question, the member from Essex, and I want to say that the member is a great ambassador for tourism in his part of Ontario.

I'm pleased the member asked this question because our government has a new initiative called Celebrate Ontario. Our government is investing three million new dollars to help organizations develop and market festivals and events across the province. Some \$2.5 million of this new money will be invested to support the growth and enhancement of existing signature festivals and events. This new initiative will provide up to \$100,000 in one-time funding assistance to develop new features for festivals and events in every region of the province. In addition to this, \$500,000 will be available to increase support for advertising and promotion of events and festivals in Ontario.

We are encouraging the people to get into festivals and events in Ontario. There's no place like this. I can assure you that if I look at each of the members of this House, I know that in their ridings there are special festivals which would attract people, not only from one part of the province to the other, which we want, but also people from outside of the province and outside of the country who will come to enjoy all that Ontario has to offer, including—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary?

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): My follow-up question to the Minister of Tourism is, I'm glad to hear that there's some more money on the table to help out festivals, because often people forget, as the Minister of Culture has pointed out many times, the contribution that festivals make not only to the dynamics of a community by having people visit Ontario and learn of a few things, but to the economic well-being. For example, I was president of the Canadian Tulip Festival for five or six years. It contributes \$30 million to the base economy, \$40 million to Ontario. That's very seldom recognized. I'd like to ask you this: We have volunteers, people struggling to keep these events alive. The tulip festival

almost went bankrupt this year. How is this particular program going help keep them alive so that they can be more and more solvent and not so dependent upon weather every May?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I want to save some time for the member for Leeds–Grenville, who has a question next. I'll cut it off with just about two seconds to go so he can get his question in.

I want to thank the member for sharing this information. The tulip festival in Ottawa is outstanding. Everyone should attend it.

It's very important for all of us to recognize the unique and exciting events happening in all of our communities across the province and to encourage people to get out and see Ontario. In fact, we invite everybody to vacation in Ontario this winter if they are able to do so. I ask all MPPs to talk to the festivals and events organizers in their communities and encourage them to apply for grants through my ministry. Organizers can visit the Ontario Tourism festivals website to find out more information on how to apply for Celebrate Ontario. As well, organizations wanting to learn more about the tourism events marketing partnership program can visit www.tourismpartners.com to get more information.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, as you know, your friends at MPAC have become extremely restless since the property assessment freeze was instituted and most recently have come down hard on owners of properties at 1 King Street West here in the city of Toronto. The minister probably knows that they are assessing those buildings as a residential assessment and applying commercial tax rates to those properties, which has caused exorbitant tax increases.

By one example cited in the media, one owner's property taxes have increased from \$1,000 per year to \$11,000 per year in taxes. In fact, these are much higher taxes than even hotels like the King Edward or the Royal York face. It is a double whammy of the higher assessment category of residential assessment, about \$300,000 per unit, and commercial tax rates. This is a tax gouge that would make even Dalton McGuinty blush. What are you going to do about it?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I guess it's late in the day, sir, and my friend from Erie–Lincoln can shape matters as he thinks best. This is a matter of properties that are commercial properties, in essence hotel rooms, being assessed as commercial properties.

There is, I tell my friend, an issue because in part the building is a condominium and in part it's a hotel, so we've undertaken a review, because we're seeing more of these hotel-condominiums emerging, and we hope that this review can provide a reasonable resolution to the issue. In the meantime, as you know, it's up to MPAC to assess properties, and if property owners are not content

with those assessments, the property owner has a process of appeal to the Assessment Review Board, and obviously we would encourage that kind of appeal.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

"Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

"Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

"Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year."

I have signed this.

VISITORS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): Mr. Speaker, I just want to introduce a point of order. We have a gallery full of incredible volunteers from Parkdale–High Park, including an outrageously handsome man, my husband, Gil.

1530

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I'm pleased to bring this petition from my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, to whom I send my greetings and those of the members of his caucus. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treat-

ment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most" people "and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I am pleased to sign this petition and to ask page Kelsea to carry it for me.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Durham.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's good to see you in the chair. The best of the season.

I'll read a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)," as promised by Dalton McGuinty during the election of 2003.

I'm pleased to sign it and support that and hand it to Philip, one of the pages who have been working here in this last session. He's done a great job.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My nephew.

Mr. O'Toole: He's Jim Wilson's nephew, actually.

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition presented to me by Mr. Sonny Sansone, a constituent of mine in Scarborough Southwest. He asked me to read it out, so I will.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas gun violence has been on the rise in the province of Ontario;

"Whereas such violence has had a devastating effect on communities across this province;

"Whereas programs supporting youth such as employment and recreation are essential in diverting youth from pursuing and embracing a culture of crime;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request that the government of Ontario, as part of its strategy to deal with gun violence, restore and fund more programs that fund initiatives that empower youth like employment and recreation."

I agree with the petition. I affix my signature to it and give it to page Simon, who's here with me today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Now, to get back in the proper rotation, the member for Toronto-Danforth, whom I couldn't see before.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): It's my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Toronto-Danforth. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas climate change is recognized as a global crisis that requires immediate action;

"Whereas in Ontario, greenhouse gas emissions alone have grown by 16% over the past decade;

"Whereas provincial policies in energy, transportation, planning and infrastructure can reduce emissions in accordance with Kyoto;

"Whereas Ontario has received failing marks for not having a coordinated strategy in place to tackle climate change and reduce emissions;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to mandate that Ontario have a climate change plan based on the Kyoto targets."

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature to it, and I will give it to page Or for presentation.

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have more petitions to do with the Mary Lake dam.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway, where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

CHILD CUSTODY

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I am pleased to present another petition on behalf of my hard-working seat mate from Niagara Falls, who keeps sending them into the Legislature, for which we thank him. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's a bit of a mouthful; here it comes:

"Whereas the people of the province of Ontario deserve and have the right to request an amendment to

the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 20(2.1) requires parents and others with custody of children to refrain from unreasonably placing obstacles to personal relations between the children and their grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2) contains a list of matters that a court must consider when determining the best interests of a child. The bill amends that subsection to include a specific reference to the importance of maintaining emotional ties between children and grandparents; and

"Whereas subsection 24(2.1) requires a court that is considering custody of or access to a child to give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child;

"Subsection 24(2.2) requires a court that is considering custody of a child to take into consideration each applicant's willingness to facilitate as much contact between the child and each parent and grandparent as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

"Whereas we support Bill 8, as introduced by Niagara Falls MPP Kim Craiton;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Children's Law Reform Act to emphasize the importance of children's relationships with their parents and grandparents."

Once again, I thank the member for Niagara Falls for continuing to send in these petitions. I sign it and I ask page Simon to carry it for me.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): God bless you, Mr. Speaker. Merry Christmas.

I have another petition saying:

"Protect Homeowners from Skyrocketing Assessments

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas working families, seniors and young people are facing higher taxes, higher home heating costs, higher hydro rates and higher user fees in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario; and

"Whereas skyrocketing property assessments and the resultant property tax increases are simply unaffordable and are forcing some homeowners, particularly seniors on fixed incomes, to sell their home; and

"Whereas Bill 75, the Homestead Act, 2006, would preserve the Canadian value of home ownership by:

"—Capping assessment increases at 5% per year,

"—Allowing homeowners to make up to \$25,000 per year in home improvements without triggering an assessment increase, and

"—Providing a property tax break for seniors and the disabled by ensuring that the first \$10,000 of their home's value would not be taxed;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The McGuinty Liberal government should adopt the assessment reforms in Bill 75, the Homestead Act."

I attach my signature in support.

PORTLANDS ENERGY CENTRE

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): I am presenting a petition on behalf of my constituents. The petition reads:

"Whereas the proposed Portlands Energy Centre power plant will increase air pollution in east end and downtown Toronto;

"Whereas the city of Toronto opposes the construction of this 550-megawatt gas-fired power plant on the waterfront;

"Whereas alternatives to the plant exist to provide the power and power savings necessary to maintain the supply of power in the city of Toronto;

"Whereas the construction of the plant will undermine efforts to conserve power, reduce pollution, develop renewable power and revitalize the waterfront;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to block the construction of the Portlands Energy Centre on the waterfront and to invest instead in energy efficiency, conservation, alternative and renewable power."

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature to the petition in agreement and pass it on to page Kelsea for submission.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I too wish you a very Merry Christmas, Speaker. This is another petition from my hard-working seatmate from Niagara Falls. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It also deals with macular degeneration, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

On behalf of my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, I certainly wish his constituents all the best. I'll sign this petition and give it to page Gloria to carry for me.

1540

FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada’s first Nobel Prize recipient; and

“Whereas this great Canadian’s original homestead, located in the town of New Tecumseth, Alliston, is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe–Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s private member’s bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

I want to thank Bob and Peter Banting for that petition.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I have a petition here which reads:

“Whereas the United States government, through the western hemisphere travel initiative, is proposing that US citizens will require a passport or single-purpose travel card to cross the Canada-US border; and

“Whereas a passport or single-purpose travel card would be an added expense, and the inconvenience of having to apply for and carry a new document would be a barrier for many Canadian and US cross-border travellers; and

“Whereas the George Bush government proposal could mean a loss of as many as 3.5 million US visitors to Ontario, and place in peril as many as 7,000 jobs in the Ontario tourism industry by 2008, many of which are valuable entry jobs for youth and new Canadians; and

“Whereas many of the US states bordering Canada have expressed similar concerns regarding the punitive economic impact of this plan, and both states and provinces along the US-Canada border recognize that the importance of the safe and efficient movement of people across that border is vital to the economies of both countries;

“Be it therefore resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the establishment of a bi-national group to establish an alternative to the proposed US border requirements, and inform Prime Minister Harper that his decision not to advocate on behalf of Ontarians is

ill-advised and contrary to the responsibilities of elected representatives in Canada.”

Since I agree with this petition, I’ll affix my signature to it and ask Connor if he would deliver it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

ATTRIBUTION DE TEMPS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 46 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House related to Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act, that the order referring Bill 173 to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly be discharged and the bill be ordered for third reading, which order may then be immediately called;

That when the order for third reading is called, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That there shall be no deferral of any vote allowed, pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Debate?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It’s a pleasure to enter into today’s debate, to be here in the House.

Fundamentally, this time allocation is about the work that MPPs do. I had the great pleasure today, on behalf of all members of this Legislature, to talk about some of the work that we do and that we did as far as developing a blueprint for growth, for environmental protection and for economic development here in Ontario—very important work, work that will last generations over the course of the next quarter of a century—for the almost four million additional people we wish to settle, the over two million jobs that we project will be created; how those are going to translate, where those people and jobs are going to grow, how it’s going to be connected together and supported by transportation, by the critical infrastructures that are necessary.

I don’t want to suggest for a minute that this work was entirely the doing of the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal or even of members on one side of the House, because I can tell you that this work, in fact, began formally as an initiative under my colleagues who are now opposite but at the time under the leadership of then-Minister Chris Hodgson in the formation of what he called Smart Growth panels. I congratulate the previous government and Chris Hodgson for the work they did in bringing this forward, in bringing people together, in bringing members of this Legislature together, to plan for

the growth and development, to build the consensus. That was tiring, painstaking work that he and other members in the then government caucus initially undertook and engaged in, but also in co-operation with members of other caucuses: the important work, the critical work, for the growth and development of this province.

Fundamentally, that's what today's motion is about, the kind of work that we do. I truly believe that I have had a privilege to be able to pick up much of where Chris Hodgson had left off and to work with a number of incredible individuals on both sides of the House, and outside of this place, to build a plan which is going to put Ontario at the forefront of growth and development.

Of course, one of the things I am especially thrilled about is that the eyes of the world are now back on our province. You know, we were in a leadership position for so many years. I don't want to ascribe it as anybody's fault, because it isn't, but we just rested on our laurels and it was time that somebody got back into the game. That's certainly happened. The world is watching and the world is looking, and the world is giving us two thumbs up.

We won the Daniel Burnham Award. Now, that's not an award that goes to David Caplan or the Ministry of Public Infrastructure; that is an award that honours the province of Ontario and all of the people who contributed to it, but certainly the leadership of MPPs in their communities, helping to develop that kind of a progressive view, that kind of a consensus, that kind of a will, and the movement and the momentum forward, to build that kind of plan.

Daniel Burnham was a very famous American planner. He was the one who developed the city of Chicago plan back in 1909 and subsequently the Chicago World's Fair and was credited with revitalizing the American Midwest. You can literally go and Google him and you will see—I think some call him the Frank Gehry of planning. He was the person whom internationally people looked to as somebody who got to understand the overall necessity of having a good plan and then having a good implementation.

Mr. Burnham said something very interesting: "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will themselves not be realized"—have bold plans, have bold dreams. That's what members of this Legislature do on behalf of the people we are honoured to serve; on behalf of the people of Don Valley East, whose neighbour I have the privilege of being and of representing them here in this Legislature; on behalf of the people of every riding where members represent, advocate for and are the voice for their particular neighbours and constituents. That's what we do. It's important work. That's what this motion before us is about. It's about the work that we do to represent our neighbours and to not only dream big dreams but to deliver on their behalf.

1550

The growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe will build opportunities for the people of Ontario by promot-

ing economic prosperity, creating better-planned communities and creating complete communities and a greater mix of business and services, housing and parks that will make us more livable; in fact, get us into that virtuous cycle where people will want to come and put down roots and raise their families. Business people will want to put down roots and raise their businesses. It's about that cycle of prosperity that we can all share in. That's the critical and important work that I've been privileged to have a hand in, that members of this Legislative Assembly and so many others have had a critical hand in.

I had a chance during ministers' statements to talk a little bit about the plan and the honour that has been bestowed on the province of Ontario. I want to thank—because I don't get a chance to—the member from Erie—Lincoln for his very kind and warm remarks.

I did want to address something that the sour and dour member from Toronto—Danforth had to say. I think it's important to put a few comments on the record. I vehemently and fundamentally disagree with him in his perspective, but of course the sour and dour have to be represented as well, and Mr. Tabuns, the member from Toronto—Danforth, does an excellent job of doing so. He said, "Maybe you should look up close at the plan. It doesn't bear out the kind of scrutiny"—I'm paraphrasing, of course. I disagree, but so do a number of other people. I'd like to put some of their remarks on the record.

I'd like to start with the honourable mayor of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion, a force in her own right. She says: "This is an historic plan." "I commend the government for taking this bold step to make our communities strong, livable and healthy, now and in the future." "The government is making real progress in building a growth plan that will help make better and stronger communities in the Golden Horseshoe region." "This vision goes a long way in making growth a benefit to all." "When implemented, the plan will protect the future of our communities and will be well received by the public."

I want to quote another local leader, Oshawa mayor John Gray. He said: "The growth plan will focus our growth in our existing cities; it will revitalize older downtowns that can benefit from new growth, take advantage of our existing infrastructure, save us money and take the pressure off building new subdivisions on the urban fringe."

I want to quote former Hamilton mayor Larry D'Ianni: "The proposed growth plan provides a clear, coherent vision for the region to make sure we stay economically prosperous in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. We look forward to working with the province on its implementation." "The growth plan," he says, "is key to Hamilton's economic future. The new growth plan shows the government is on the right track."

I want to quote the former mayor of Barrie, Rob Hamilton: "It is imperative that we have this growth plan in place to support the growth that is coming to our area and to ensure that we have the infrastructure in place."

I want to quote the former mayor of Peterborough, Silvia Sutherland: "Peterborough will benefit from the

growth plan. The province's focus on revitalizing existing urban centres makes sense for the city and we look forward to working together with the province on this initiative."

I want to quote the former mayor of Burlington, Rob MacIsaac—

The Acting Speaker: I would like to remind the honourable member that we are debating government closure motion number 286. I have yet to hear—and I've been very patient; almost 10 minutes—that even being mentioned. I would ask you to get to the issue at hand.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Speaker, I did say that this bill is about the work that we do as MPPs, and I firmly believe that. These local leaders recognize the work that this Legislative Assembly does. In fact, Rob MacIsaac, the former mayor of Burlington, said so: "The vision that the province"—that's the MPPs, the members of this Legislature, who are the subject of notice of motion 286.

Moving forward—and Speaker, I know you'd want to acknowledge this—the province has, for the greater Golden Horseshoe, the vision, as shared by the city of Burlington: "We want a vibrant pedestrian and transit-friendly community where people can enjoy a high quality of life. The proposed growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe is a big step forward to getting us there." "The draft growth plan reflects a good fit with the goals of the Greenbelt Task Force"—another initiative of this Legislative Assembly and the important work that we do on behalf of the constituents whom we serve, which of course is the subject of notice of motion 286.

The former mayor of Markham, Don Cousens: "We are very excited about the possibilities that the growth plan will give to Markham city centre. The province's thinking is in line with our own," reflecting the fact that the province—I'm injecting now—is very much in line and working with MPPs on all sides and the important work we do. Don Cousens, a former member here in the House, my good friend from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound knows well. We have great affection for Don and wish him and his family well during this holiday season. "The province's thinking is in line with our own on the need to build transit supportive downtowns where people can live, work and play in close proximity."

But of course it would be important to quote city of Toronto Mayor David Miller: "The province's growth plan will be a great help to the government of Toronto as we implement our own plans to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of new residents we expect in the next 30 years."

You see, working with our local leadership is one of the key jobs of members of this assembly. It's some of the most important work we do. But it's not just in those communities. Regional chairs, like a former member of this House, Peter Partington, regional chair for the region of Niagara: "As a part of the greater Golden Horseshoe, Niagara is unique in terms of the assets and opportunities that it brings to the future growth of Ontario. Places to Grow not only addresses how we manage our inheritance from the past, but it focuses on what we can accomplish

by working together in the future,"—working together, members on both sides of the House, the important work that we do on behalf of our constituents. He goes on to say, "Niagara plays a key economic role ... both as a vibrant smart growth community and as an economic corridor between two countries."

There are so many more local views by local leadership and by others in business and industry and in the environmental sector. I would mention, of course, the work that we do with people outside of this House, people like Joe Berridge, a well known advocate for cities, well known in this city as a member of the Toronto Board of Trade, certainly, but as a progressive thinker: "Now is the time for this kind of bold direction for the future of the region," he writes. "The province must move forward on the growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe and put in place the necessary transit and land-use tools to ensure that the region stays a wonderful place to live, and remain competitive on a global scale."

There are others, people like Neil Rodgers, of the Urban Development Institute: "Places to Grow is a positive step in a right direction.

"It recognizes the need for a competitive and affordable land supply, urban intensification and investment in public infrastructure to ensure Ontario remains globally competitive.

"The growth plan is a significant achievement and will ensure the future growth and economic competitiveness of the region and province. It demonstrates the province's leadership in planning for growth and infrastructure investment in the GGH."

There are so many others: Jan Kasperski, from the Ontario College of Family Physicians—because this is a broad coalition of MPPs on all sides of the House, and the important work that we do is recognized in this motion 286 here today. Jan says: "We know that urban sprawl has an adverse effect on people's health.

"The Ontario government's connected strategies such as the ... growth plan and the planning reform initiative are positive ... steps in controlling" urban sprawl.

"The Ontario College of Family Physicians recognizes the importance of developing and implementing strategies to control sprawling growth—and the need to plan for safe and healthy communities."

There are so many more: Chris Winter of the Conservation Council of Ontario; David Crombie of the Canadian Urban Institute; Mike Harcourt, former Premier of the province of British Columbia and the Prime Minister's adviser on cities. Those are just here at home, people who up close live in, work in and lead this community.

I know that I have more than illustrated why my dour and sour friend from Toronto—Danforth is simply wrong in his assessment, why we disagree, and I would encourage him to vote for this motion. I would encourage him to support the work that MPPs do in planning the growth and development, the economic prosperity and ultimately the high quality of life that our residents and neighbours would like. I will be voting in support of this motion. I

wish to encourage all members on all sides to do likewise, and I thank you, Speaker.

1600

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I was asked to participate in the debate this afternoon just a few minutes ago, but I am pleased to have this opportunity to reflect upon the situation that's before the House today and to offer my comments to the Legislature.

I want to begin by wishing you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the House all the best of the holiday season. I think all of us are looking forward to the break that's coming so that we can spend some time with our families. I certainly am one of those members who is looking forward to spending some family time after a long fall sitting of the Legislature.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, in his comments on this motion this afternoon, indicated that in his view, the debate this afternoon is about the work that the members of provincial Parliament do, and I would agree with that. I am very pleased to be joined in the House by my colleague the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Bill and I have been good friends since we were both first elected in 1990, and I know Bill is one of the most popular politicians in Ontario in terms of the support that he has in his riding. He deserves it. He has worked hard to achieve it over the years, first, for many years, as a member of county council, the local council, as the reeve of Sydenham township, and as the warden of the county of Grey before he was elected in 1990. Some members may not know this, but his plurality in a tough election in 2003—the last election, of course, which was pretty tough for our party—was one of the highest in the province. And again, he has worked hard to earn that, to earn the trust of his electorate, to earn the respect of his constituents, and no member in this House is harder working in his riding than Bill Murdoch.

I want to touch upon the issue before the House today in another way as well, because the issue involves the compensation of members, of course. I was first elected to this place in 1990, and I felt very honoured and privileged, and have been honoured and privileged to serve here ever since. But I can honestly say that when I first ran as a candidate in 1990, I had no idea what the members were paid; I had no idea what the total compensation was. I was aware of the fact that the members were reasonably paid.

At that time, I was working as executive assistant for my predecessor, Jack Johnson, who served here for 15 years with distinction. I had some idea of what I was getting into, but I didn't inquire as to what the pay was. I wasn't that concerned about it. I wanted to serve; that's why I was running. Mr. Johnson was retiring after 15 years of service, and our party needed a candidate. Again, that 1990 election was a tough election for us, but I worked my heart out in that election campaign and I was supported by a lot of good people on our campaign team and across the riding. I was fortunate enough to be successful in that election.

Again, I have to say how honoured and privileged I feel to be here, to do the work that we do. I think the Ontario Legislature is an important parliamentary institution. I'm concerned about what may happen in the future if Bill 173 doesn't pass, because I think we do risk becoming a second-rate parliamentary institution vis-à-vis the federal House of Commons. For that reason, I've expressed support for Bill 173.

I realize the New Democrats are opposed to it, and they have every right to express their concerns. The fact that we're here discussing this issue an extra week above and beyond what we anticipated is of no concern to me, other than I wish I was spending time with my family. But certainly I feel an obligation to be here to participate in the discussion this week. The New Democrats have their perspective. I don't agree with it, but they have every right to express their views on this issue. They have done that very well this week.

I want to talk a little bit about the work I've been doing in my riding in recent weeks, because there have been a number of issues that I've had the opportunity to bring forward in the Legislature that I feel very strongly about with respect to the riding of Waterloo-Wellington.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal in his comments talked about the Places to Grow initiative, and I know he's very proud of the recognition that the government has received today. He was gracious in terms of talking about how our government, under the leadership of Chris Hodgson, the former Minister of Municipal Affairs, had laid down a lot of the groundwork with his Smart Growth initiative that the current government has attempted to build upon with Places to Grow.

There is a great deal of interest in the Places to Grow initiative as it affects our area, in Wellington county in particular. I've had the opportunity to raise this issue in the Legislature by talking about the target growth numbers that Places to Grow seems to have for our area. Places to Grow would have you believe that the county of Wellington and the city of Guelph will increase in population from 195,000 people in 2001, the most recent census data, to 321,000 people by 2031, an increase of 126,000 people. That's a 65% increase over 30 years in communities that I serve and represent that draw their water from the ground, the vast majority of which lack any form of public transit, and that are served by a county and separated city form of government. So we are quite concerned as to how this growth will be managed, and we have a lot of questions about how the infrastructure will be paid for.

I think it's incumbent upon the government to bring forward a plan for the infrastructure that's going to be needed if we're going to be able to absorb this kind of population increase in our area. I would encourage the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to take a sincere interest in what's being said by the municipal politicians in Waterloo-Wellington on this issue, because I've heard from a number of them. I believe fundamentally that communities should grow at a pace at which they wish to grow, and that if communities want to

grow modestly or remain relatively constant in their population, the provincial government shouldn't be interfering in that or dictating to them what size their communities are going to grow to.

I've also had the opportunity to raise in the House this week my appreciation to the Minister of Transportation for the fact that Highway 6 between Fergus and Arthur is going to be rebuilt. I understand that the tenders have been called for, and it's about a \$20-million highway job. This stretch of Highway 6 is very much needed. I'm sure the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound would suggest that Highway 6 needs to be rebuilt right up to Owen Sound, and I would certainly concur with that. But this particular stretch of highway, between the communities of Fergus and Arthur, has fallen into a very, very severe state of disrepair.

When I was first elected in 1990, the very first words that I uttered in this House as the member for Wellington were to draw attention to the need to repair and upgrade Highway 6. That was 16 years ago. I raised it continually in those early years in the 1990s and the government of the day responded with assistance—a highway project, actually—rebuilding Highway 6 from Guelph north to Fergus, but that's where the project stopped. So we've got a lot of work to do in the months ahead.

I've worked hard to raise the transportation issues in my constituency in the Legislature by advocating for the Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan. In January 2003, I wrote a letter to each of the municipal councils in my riding and asked them to give me their advice as to what the highway and transportation priorities were for those councils and what projects they would want me to advocate for for the next five years and beyond. Each municipal council responded with a list of their priority projects. We packaged all of those projects together, some 40 projects, and called it the Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan. I've attempted to highlight our transportation needs as opportunities have come up month to month, week to week, and I'm pleased that the government has responded with this Highway 6 project. So I'll continue to advocate for all of the projects on that list. We're not done yet, but I do believe that we have to make transportation a higher priority because it's so important for our economy and so important for road safety. So these are things I'm going to continue to raise.

I think I have used the time that I was asked to speak on today. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your indulgence in terms of allowing me to talk about my role as a member as well as the work that we do as MPPs. I don't anticipate that the New Democrats are going to support this motion today, as the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal asked them to do, but I certainly think most of the members will, and I think we need to move forward on this issue.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I, along with a number of other New Democrat members, will be speaking to Bill 173, because I know there's some interest on the part of the people of Ontario on this issue. What the government has done this afternoon is presented

a motion to shut off debate, to in effect guillotine further debate of the McGuinty government's proposal for a 31% pay increase. People, in listening to the spokesperson for the McGuinty government, may have thought, "Well, I heard him talk, but I didn't hear him refer to the bill at all." That is because I think members of the McGuinty government want to avoid discussing this issue at all costs, and that is the reason for this government motion shutting down debate.

1610

So that people understand how this works, the government uses its majority and brings in a motion saying that there shall be no further debate on this issue, requires an immediate vote on the issue, and then the government hopes that they can hide the issue, put it to bed, and that people will forget about the issue over the Christmas holidays and into the new year. I don't think that strategy is going to work. It hasn't worked so far. I don't think it's going to work into the future.

But I want, again, people at home to know why New Democrats are opposed to this motion, why we're opposed to shutting down debate on this issue, and why we're opposed to the government's Bill 173 in the first place. As I say, Bill 173 is all about the McGuinty government trying to ram through this Legislature a 31% pay increase, and do it at Christmastime, when they hope that the people of Ontario are not watching.

My reasons for opposing the bill and the New Democrats' reasons for opposing the bill are essentially three: one, we think it is underhanded and that it appears sneaky when a government tries to ram through this kind of legislation immediately before Christmas when, admittedly, many people are preoccupied with other issues. I think any reasonable outside observer would say that the process the McGuinty government is engaged in here is sneaky and underhanded. So that's certainly one of my objections. What we're seeing today is a furtherance of that strategy on the part of the McGuinty government, to shut down democratic debate, to avoid public hearings on the issue, to avoid further discussion of the issue. This is a very anti-democratic step, in effect a guillotine motion: Shut down debate and force the issue through.

The second reason that I am opposed to this legislation is that context is everything in society. The context that we see now in many parts of Ontario is not a good one. I asked the Minister of Natural Resources today, who has watched the destruction of 45,000 direct and indirect jobs in the forest sector in northern Ontario, if he thought that he was entitled to a \$40,000 pay increase, when he's presided over the destruction, as I say, of 40,000 direct and indirect jobs in the forest sector. I think that's a question that needs to be answered. Personally, I don't think anyone who has presided over the destruction of 40,000 direct and indirect jobs in the forest sector deserves any kind of pay increase. In fact, what they probably deserve is to be out of the job that they're in now. But we see something of the standards of the Premier in this matter when he suggests that someone who has presided over

the loss of 50,000 jobs, direct and indirect, in the forest sector should receive a very substantial pay increase.

And it is substantial. Let's be clear: The pay increase that McGuinty government members, aided by Conservative members, want to vote themselves is more money than a lot of workers make in a year. In other words, the size of the increase is larger than the annual salaries of many workers. The average woman worker in Ontario gets paid an annual income of \$25,600. When you add all of this in, the pay increase and the increase to RSP contributions, the government is in effect voting itself a holus-bolus increase here, an immediate increase, in excess of what the average woman worker makes in this province in a year. That, I suggest, is incredible.

The government has tried to argue that MPPs are low-paid. Well, the fact of the matter is, and Statistics Canada tells us this, that for an MPP in Ontario, a member of the provincial Parliament of Ontario, the pay is in the top 10% of income earners. In other words, MPPs earn more than 90% of the income earners in this province. So we're already in the top 10%.

What the McGuinty government proposes to do in one fell swoop now is to move into the top 5%. MPPs will then make more than 95% of the constituents whom we're called upon to serve. That's quite a substantial change in a very short time, from being in the top 10% to being pushed up to the top 5% of income recipients in the province.

Ontario MPPs make more money now, before the pay raise, than members of the Legislative Assembly in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. So context is important, and when you look at the context, it suggests to me that this is not warranted.

But I think from the perspective of all those Ontarians who are being told by this government to work longer and harder for less, that's happening. For those people who are struggling to make ends meet on minimum wage, we know that minimum wage in Ontario now is not a living wage. People who are working for minimum wage are in many cases working two or three jobs. They have one job during the day, another job in the evening and a further job on the weekend, all in an effort to make ends meet, and they can't do it. They can't pay the rent, they can't put food on the table and they increasingly have difficulty looking after their kids. What is the government's answer to those folks? The McGuinty government's answer is, "No increase." We put forward a proposal to increase the minimum wage to a modest \$10 an hour. The response of the McGuinty government is, "No, absolutely not." From the perspective of all those people who are trying to survive, struggling to survive on the basis of Ontario Works benefits, to all of those people who are struggling to survive—and I mean struggling to survive—on the very limited Ontario disability support plan benefits, this is grossly unfair and unwarranted. To those lowest-income children in the province who actually see the McGuinty government claw back from them and their families literally hundreds of dollars each

month, money that is provided to them by the federal government to help them have a better standard of living, yet the McGuinty government claws that money back from them, from their perspective this is unwarranted, unjustified and unfair.

I think context is important. The context of the McGuinty government's trying to ram through this 31% pay increase when so many others in Ontario are having to struggle, when many others in Ontario have lost their jobs, when many others are actually seeing the government claw back money from them, is not a good context.

Finally, I oppose this legislation. I oppose what the government wants to do here in terms of a 31% pay increase because I think it's bad public policy. I think it's very bad public policy for MPPs or anyone to go around awarding themselves a 31% pay increase. How does this government then go to grossly overpaid people such as Tom Parkinson at Hydro One, or the successor of Tom Parkinson at Hydro One, and say, "You have to receive less"? How does this government approach Ontario Power Generation? How does this government deal with the explosion of very high income salaries at the Ontario Power Authority? I think it's bad public policy when governments of any stripe and at any level engage in this kind of activity to holus-bolus, all at once, with very little discussion, trying to avoid public discussion, simply say, "a 31% pay increase." I think it's very bad public policy.

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But I think what the government is trying to do today is worst of all: trying to shut down debate. The irony is, this is a Premier and this is a government that said that all legislation should have a public hearing, that legislation should be out there for the public to comment on so that the public can be heard and can make its points. What the government is doing today by this gag order, by this guillotine motion, is an attempt to terminate and avoid public hearings, to stop the people of Ontario from having any say, to stop the people of Ontario from exercising their democratic right to speak out on issues, to be heard on issues and to voice an opinion. I think this speaks volumes about how the McGuinty government will say one thing and then do another, how the McGuinty government will profess to believe in one thing and do something totally different. That is what is there for all to see once again today.

When the government presented their legislation for this 31% pay increase, I got a very interesting call from someone, who said, "You know, I watched Dalton McGuinty in the last election. I saw him make promise after promise after promise, and I've watched him break almost every one of them. But you know what? I don't remember him promising that the 31% pay increase was a priority. How is it that something that was never promised, was never mentioned, suddenly becomes a legislative priority for the McGuinty government when all of the things that were promised and we were told were a priority have been forgotten over and over, and promises broken repeatedly, by the McGuinty government?"

I think that is a fair question for people to ask. That's one of the things that would have happened in public hearings. People could have asked, when did this become such an all-important priority for the McGuinty government? When did the McGuinty government go to the people and say this was more important than everything else? That is clearly the case.

We have a number of bills—important bills—that have passed second reading, that are sitting on the order paper: a bill, for example, that would protect health care workers who work in our hospitals and our homes for the aged from very serious needle-stick injuries; a bill that would ensure more fair treatment of firefighters who suffer from cancer as a result of chemicals and conditions that they have experienced on the job; a bill to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour.

Is the McGuinty government dealing with any of these issues in any sense of urgency? Not at all. Those pieces of legislation are being left to languish on the order paper by the McGuinty government as they rush through their own 31% pay increase—I repeat, a pay increase that is larger than what the average woman worker in the province of Ontario makes in a year. The average woman worker gets paid \$26,500. This one-time, holus-bolus pay increase is actually larger than the income that the average woman worker in this province receives in a year.

I know that many of my colleagues also want to speak to this legislation, so I'm going to ensure that they have that opportunity. But let me say again to folks across Ontario, the context of this is bad. It is bad public policy at any time to try to usher through a 31% pay increase. I think it sends all the wrong signals out there. Especially the process that the McGuinty government has engaged in here has been bad, because the perception is that it has been sneaky, it has been underhanded, it has been less than transparent and it has been less than open with the people of Ontario. For all of those reasons, what the government's trying to do here today is wrong. We should continue to have debate, and we should have public hearings on this legislation and hold the McGuinty government to yet again one of the promises they made before the last election.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion this afternoon. I would note that the members on the opposite side have a somewhat short memory when it comes to time allocation motions. In fact, our government has introduced over 102 government bills, we've passed 83 bills and we've only time-allocated 14. That is, by far, the fewest number of bills any government has time-allocated since 1990, considerably less than the Tories who time-allocated a whopping 102 bills.

To my friend the leader of the third party, I would also like to note that the NDP did use time allocation over five times more than the previous Liberal government before them. When they were doing their greatest piece of work, as some people see it, ripping up collective agreements with their social contract, they allowed no time for third party debate, and no public hearings when they raised the

gas taxes. So it does not lie well in the mouth of the leader of the third party to be speaking so vehemently in opposition to this motion today when in fact his party's history is not unblemished.

I'd like to take the lead from the member for Waterloo–Wellington, who today spoke about some of the things that are of concern to his riding and some of the things that he is working on, on behalf of his riding. As well, the leader of the third party did talk about a number of things that are before this House and that are being debated and discussed. I'd like to talk about some of the things today that are of interest to the people of my riding and some of the things that we've accomplished over the last year in my riding.

Just this last Friday, we had a groundbreaking for the new Mattawa hospital site, a project that's been long discussed that resulted from a hospital that had a fire in 1967 and that has been housed in portables for the last nearly 40 years. I can tell you that it was a happy day in the community of Mattawa on Saturday as they saw ground broken on the site and heard from the contractors directly that they would start construction this past Monday, or at least start the ground clearing and moving forward. We'll see lots of work on the site in January. It's a delighted community, a deserving community and a very deserving staff and group at the hospital, who have been working in less than standard conditions for so many years. So to the medical director, Dr Wilkins, and to all of the medical staff, the nurses and the volunteers at the Mattawa General Hospital, as well as all of the fundraisers who have worked so hard on this project, I say congratulations. To the members of the community, to the mayor and the councillors, and to the over 800 people who came out last fall for a rally in support of the hospital, I say to them congratulations and a very Merry Christmas. What a delightful present for the town of Mattawa.

We've also seen progress in the town of Powassan, where their number one infrastructure project has been a water tower. We were pleased to be able to announce provincial support for the construction of a new water tower in Powassan that is moving forward. Again, their council declared that as their number one priority and that is now moving forward as a result of the support of this government.

We've seen new libraries, redeveloped libraries and refurbished libraries in the town of Bonfield, and again, in the town of Mattawa, where we've seen the public library relocated into the high school library site, therefore creating a hub in the community at F-J-McElligott, F-J being a high school in the community of Mattawa that was at risk of closure under the Conservative government and is now revitalized and thriving in the town of Mattawa.

We've moving forward with our hospital in North Bay. The North Bay Regional Health Centre has been a project long discussed. It is the co-location of the Northeast Mental Health Centre and the North Bay regional hospital. They will be co-locating on a new site.

It has gone to tender. The proposals have been accepted. We are presently reviewing those tenders and should have the new proponent announced in the very new year. We'll see shovels in the ground on that project in March, if not sooner. Given the weather that we've had up north of late, it could be very much sooner, given that we haven't had much freezing nor much ground frost.

This too is a project that has been long discussed and long-awaited, and our community is delighted to see progress being made on that front. It's a huge infrastructure project, the largest construction project that my community will see, and we are delighted to see it moving forward. It will benefit all of our area, our region, and in fact the entire northeast of Ontario, as the Northeast Mental Health Centre will be housed there in a co-location.

1630

We saw as well the opening of the OPP communications centre this fall. The communications centre is a \$4-million state-of-the-art facility that provides a communication hub for all of northeastern Ontario, an important facility and infrastructure in my community. Certainly, the OPP and the great staff who are there—I haven't been out on the RIDE program yet. I usually get out on the coldest night of the year; we haven't had the coldest night of the year, so I guess that's why we haven't been out yet. But I know that they're out there every night on the RIDE program working hard on our behalf. I thank the OPP officers and congratulate them on that new infrastructure and the new building that they now have to work in.

As well, the water treatment plant for the city of North Bay is moving forward again. That's a partnership between the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government. Our provincial government is in for \$19 million. There is much construction going on on Lakeside Drive in North Bay and we are seeing that moving forward.

My students in the riding of Nipissing are benefiting from the resources and the investments that this government has made in our secondary and elementary schools. We have seen class sizes declining. We had the Minister of Education visiting our riding this fall, and she had a great visit at Almaguin school—a school that is much in need of upgrade and a new build. They were able to show the minister why it is that they are so deserving of a new school. We hope to be able to move forward with that in the near future.

We also visited a brand new school in Callander, as well as a very small rural school in Astorville. The minister had a great experience visiting with the students and the teachers, as well as visiting a brand new French high school in the city of North Bay. It was a great day. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to highlight the great work that our teachers are doing in my area, that our schools are doing in the four different boards that we have, and to see the results of the investments that we as a government have made in education across the province.

Right outside my office in downtown North Bay, out the back door, is the new transit centre, which is well under way and in the midst of construction. This is a result of the gas tax that the province has been forwarding to our municipalities. The new transit centre will be a hub for North Bay transit and also will attract more people to downtown North Bay and to our wonderful waterfront, which continues to be developed and is being worked on as we speak.

These are just some of the investments that we have seen in my riding of Nipissing over the last few months. We've seen such great progress; we've seen such great strides made. We've seen investment in economic development in Rahn Plastics, one of my local employers which, through a northern Ontario heritage fund grant, was able to move into a new office space and expand their work force by 10 employees—again, a great investment in a great employer in our community. That investment will allow that employer to develop its business to a point where it will be able to compete on a North American scale, which is so terribly important for some of our businesses in the north that need to broaden their markets. This is one example of where strategic investment on behalf of the government through the northern Ontario heritage fund is seeing growth and development in the north.

That's just one of the many examples of economic development and growth that we're seeing in my region. Of course, the mining industry is thriving across the north, and we have many mining suppliers in my community which are also benefiting from the growth of that sector.

We are not, of course, protected from the downturn in the lumber industry that has hit the industry North America-wide. We do have some communities that are hit by the impact of that. We are working hard, especially in Bonfield-Mattawa, where we've seen some downturn at Columbia. We're working hard with them through their economic development group to assist those workers who have been displaced as well as those communities in seeking out new economic opportunities. We are working on a number of projects with them at the moment that I'm hoping in the new year will prove to be a great success for those communities.

I am delighted to stand here today and say that I support Bill 173, the bill that we are discussing today. I believe that it is a question of fairness. I believe that it is appropriate that we be receiving, at a minimum, 75% of what our federal counterparts are making. We represent the same ridings, more or less, we represent the same constituents, and certainly we do at least the same amount of work. To be at 60% of those wages is inappropriate. I do believe it is a public policy question, though I disagree with the leader of the third party, who argued that it was bad public policy. I think it is good public policy to attract good people to this Legislature.

I know many people in this Legislature have taken pay cuts to be here. I am one of them. I make no bones about that. But I'm here to do the public service that my father

did so proudly for 12 years. I strive every day to fill those large footprints and to serve the people of Nipissing as best I can. I think the majority of people in this House are here for the same reason: to serve their constituents; to serve the people we have been elected by and have the privilege to represent here in this Legislature; to serve the public interest and the greater public interest of Ontario citizens.

I appreciate the opportunity today to speak to this motion and of course I will be supporting the motion. I'm going to be sharing my time with the member for Perth—Middlesex.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): This afternoon the House is debating a time allocation motion. I can only say that this particular motion before us today is not the first time the government, which was outraged when we were government, has used time allocation.

I just want to draw to mind, more recently, a very difficult decision on our side of the House under our leader, John Tory, when Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code, was time-allocated, after it was agreed by the subcommittee that the hearings would continue and there would be time allocated for that. In fact, the government went forward with the advice of that committee, an all-party committee, to advertise that there would indeed be public hearings, and many people were left on the waiting list, another waiting list, if you will, not unlike the health care waiting list which was the subject of many questions by our leader today. That bill typifies to some extent what we're dealing with at an emotional level, I suppose, not allowing full debate on an issue. This issue on Bill 107 took away the voice of the most vulnerable people of society, which was quite unforgivable, quite frankly, on an issue that affects people who are exposed to risks in their own lives and often tragedy in their own lives. This time allocation motion is basically doing similar things.

But in my view on this bill, I think it's important to look at the order paper, and I have done just that. Looking at the order paper, there could be and should be more time given and more voice given to some of the important bills. I won't just dwell this afternoon, in the little time I have, on a number of my own personal bills. Just looking around at members who have submitted very worthwhile bills, Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East this week introduced a bill that—I can tell you that for the last several years, I personally have written to the Minister of Finance several times and have always received the standard pulled-out-of-the-binder reply. The answer was no. I commend her for advocating for her constituents, indeed for the seniors of Ontario, many of whom are finding it difficult at this time to access their own funds.

If you look at that particular bill—and Ms. Horwath would know from her consultations—often what happens, the way the rule works, you can qualify under very prescriptive rules, the father-knows-best approach. Quite frankly, there are exceptions made. You have to appear before a bureaucratic panel and disclose all of your

frailties in life—that you're destitute, roughly, before you can access your own money, although if the person who had the resources to have some money tucked away in a RIF or an annuity were to pass away, the spouse would get the money, which makes it a little bit tragic when they couldn't have a quality life together using their own money. I understand there are risks going forward in that whole debate about making sure they don't draw down all their funds to preclude having a smooth horizon of income with some predictability. It is controversial, but nonetheless other provinces, the point has been made, have done the right thing and reviewed it. I think setting the regulations, some kind of assessment of expenditures and things like that, some of it could be to support their needs for help as they age, for having support in the home, other things that would otherwise flow to the government to take care of. So I think there's some room there.

1640

I quite frankly link it to the whole debate around Bill 140, which is the long-term-care act. Our critic and former Minister of Health, Elizabeth Witmer, spoke on it. Under Bill 140, there's a really serious gap, because there are four types of homes, as we would know. The A type home is the newer version, built under our government, when 20,000 new long-term-care beds were built, about 900 in my riding of Durham. Now, the D homes are also addressed in Bill 140. These are the least preferable. These homes will, over time, I gather, qualify for some provincial funding on capital. Obviously, that means some increased funding on the operating side as well.

But who gets left out are roughly 35,000 beds in the B and C class homes. These are homes where individuals, family members, our loved ones, would find themselves in more or less a ward, perhaps up to four beds. They probably wouldn't have an accessible bathroom in their own room. Many of them would have difficulties in mobility. Many are in walkers or wheelchairs or, even worse still, have to be carried, to receive personal support. I think of the difficulty not just for the patients and their families under that issue—although certainly the loved ones are primarily, hopefully, engaged in the issue—but the staff themselves working in these rather cluttered rooms, often without the lifting devices and the room to move these devices around in the facilities. It's just not conscionable. There's no plan. In fact, what I'm hearing in my riding—I think of Fosterbrooke, which is a nice, family-type setting. I believe it's a C type home. They do their very best, I must say, and I commend the staff for making it as homelike as possible. Many people choose to live there because they enjoy the companionship and the company. It is, after all, their home.

For them to modernize on their own—this is the private type of home. Mind you, they are all under the same standards and regulations of care etc. They're doing it rather frugally. But if they were to go to a financial institution to access funds, they would find that the licensing process which would assure their revenue stream is maybe at risk, because they could be shut down

at the whim of the minister. That, quite frankly, is another bill that I'm glad is under pressure from the opposition and will go out for hearings during the winter session. That's the kind of voice that should be here: "Take your time to get things right."

But I look at other pieces of legislation, and they don't get the time. If you look at some of the private members' bills—I mentioned Ms. Horwath's bill, but I would also mention, for instance, Jim Wilson, who has obviously made much to-do about preserving the heritage of the homestead, in his riding, of Sir Frederick Banting. I credit him for relentlessly, even with little support from the minister when questioned, working to preserve a heritage of Canada's first winner of the Nobel Prize, I believe, and also recognized at every level. Not preserving that heritage is a statement that perhaps they don't care. I wouldn't want to imply that, but my conclusion on that remark is that Jim Wilson has done a commendable job of bringing voice to an issue important to his riding, one that should be important in a broader sense to each of us here.

I would say that, if you look at it, there have been a number of private members' bills by all members, and really, all they're asking for is time to have it debated, to influence the government or perhaps the civil service, what we often call bureaucrats, many of whom are simply that: hard-working professionals. Quite frankly, if there's political or policy will on the side of the government to recognize that, they would move forward. But when you shut down the debate on private members' business or other initiatives by the opposition—I'm anxious with our leader talking tomorrow about the access to justice. His issue will be debated tomorrow morning, and he really is quite sincere about making sure we don't have—Mr. Ouellette raised a question today about a predator in his riding, Oshawa, and the threat it constitutes, potentially, to children and others in the community.

What the government needs to do here is to listen in question period and respond. Often we can shuffle this stuff off and say, "It's before the courts. We can't do anything about it." But quite frankly, they have a responsibility to influence policy and the interpretation of policy in the civil service itself. They have to take direction from government, or should take direction from government. Really, you look even deeper; you probe into this. The point I'm making is simply listening and taking the time to respond in a thoughtful manner. Things won't change, but at least the issue gets reviewed with some thoroughness.

I look at the recent report from the auditor. Part of what he said was quite insightful, looking at not just the Hydro One issue and that misuse of trust and misuse of public funding—that's quite troubling. Scrutiny at all levels is extremely important in the public debate. I think that when our finance critic, Tim Hudak, responded and drew a fair amount of attention to the issue of the expedited spending by the McGuinty government in the dying hours of their mandate—money that was never

forecast in their last budget. This was the most troubling part: when you saw this almost trying to buy votes. I'm not sure if that's correct, but I'd say that the impression out there is that they're just flushing money into the system with, quite conceivably, not-very-well-developed plans.

In fact, the consultation itself is something that we weren't made aware of in this House. The end result of that taxpayers' money—will it have good outcomes? The final measurement is not the amount, but are things better? People should ask themselves continuously, when they see the photo op and the press release—go out and actually see what's going on in your community; go out and actually listen. Is there still gridlock? Are there still wait lists? Are there still problems in our schools? Are there still issues that need to be dealt with? The auditor, on the issue of wait times—when he used the term "misleading" I thought it would be ruled out of order. But he said it in the report, and therefore it's been used several times here. In that case, if you're looking at an independent, qualified individual like the Auditor General of Ontario, it needs to have debate and attention; it should be paid very close attention to.

Minister Chambers in the children's aid issue I believe is well-intentioned. I have spoken to her; I think she is very well-intended. But it is her responsibility and indeed Premier McGuinty's responsibility to direct very specifically in the children's aid case, in the Tom Parkinson case, and to intervene, even at great risk—because this stuff ends up in the courts at any account. That's the lesson to be learned with the use of time allocation. Minister Chambers would probably benefit from those interventions, if not by herself, then certainly by the Premier. It is his duty, whether he's—in fact, the Leader of the Opposition, in the debate tomorrow on the whole issue of bail and hearings and time served—these are issues that I hope the Attorney General will be listening to tomorrow.

I see the Minister of Transportation here today. I missed this afternoon only, but I know she was out at a press release this morning. It was some kind of good news of the federal Stephen Harper government coming to the rescue with a few dollars. She was there for the photo op, and I hope it's a partnership arrangement, but does it do anything for my riding? I'm appalled, quite frankly. I met with them.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I'm actually trying to draw attention to the importance of listening.

What I'm looking for is speedy, expeditious, efficient progress on Highway 407 east. It is the number one priority for the region of Durham. Its economic vitality is dependent on good, balanced, fair treatment. The mid-peninsula corridor is another area that's often mentioned. I can only say today that I put the maximum number of questions on the order paper for the Minister of Transportation to be—these are genuine, straightforward questions that have come from stakeholders that I think deserve attention and need reasoned and thoughtful

responses, not just the political rhetoric stuff. The people do get frustrated with us, I'm sure with all members from all sides of the House, for not paying attention to the important decisions that are before the government.

1650

They are the government. This gets to the salient point here. They moved time allocation. It wasn't John Tory and it wasn't John O'Toole or Tim Hudak or whoever else is in the legislative precinct. In fact, it wasn't even members of the government side, I don't think. I think there are other things at play here.

As I said, I could go through a number of private members' notices of motions as well as private members' business. I would say that the bills that are important and need time are not even specific to the Conservative side. I'm looking at the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. It has some bills before it, and they are bills that are, I believe, important to members regardless of their political stripe.

The very first one I'm looking at here is Bill 9, An Act to prohibit price discrimination on the basis of gender, by Mr. Berardinetti. That's before that committee. It will probably never see the light of day. I'm loath to say that, but quite frankly, it is up to the House leaders to give these things a breath of fresh air.

Another one that I know has been argued and debated—at first reading it was well received—is Bill 42, An Act to establish the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund Corporation. It's Mr. Sterling's. He is quite serious. The Lanark-Carleton member is always trying to advocate, most of the time when he's here, to bring that to the attention of the House.

Bill 49, An Act to celebrate and recognize rural Ontario, is another one, by Ms. Mitchell, who I think is here today. I was speaking to her earlier. I think of the work done by Bert Johnson when he was here. He was a Deputy Speaker of some note. He declared agricultural heritage day, and it's celebrated as we speak. There's a private member's bill that, under the leadership I believe of Mike Harris at the time, did get assent into law.

Bill 74, An Act respecting safety around swimming pools, is by Mr. Rinaldi, who is here today. I know that he's intent on that. We had a couple of children a couple of weeks ago in one of those detention ponds in community development zones. That could have come into that debate. Should they be fenced? Is that not part of the developer's responsibility, to ensure against liability, or does that liability fall to the municipality? That's an unresolved issue. I remember on council myself that people used to say to me, "Gee, that big hole there—what's that for?" Pretty soon in the winter it was a skating rink. It wasn't safe. Those are the issues that are important to constituents, but in the broader sense they're important for public safety and they should be discussed.

Bill 115, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to improve air quality by reducing truck emissions, is by Ms. Scott. I know Ms. Scott, from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, is completely committed to road safety. In fact, the environment for her is of paramount concern.

I could go on listing these bills, but the point I'm making is that if we do all of the energized and informed input, discussion and comment with respect to legislative initiatives, private or government initiatives, there has to be two-way communication. I put it to the government and I put it to the members here today: Express the views not necessarily from the party handbook but the views that your constituents have offered you. That's what I call the full debate on democratic renewal.

Earlier this week, I spoke at a couple of high schools—to the man-in-society class, or a political class, I guess it was, in a general sense—about Bill 155, which is the referendum act. I tried to explain to them that there was another bill prior to it—I think it was Bill 211 or Bill 214, I'm not too sure which—that changed the fixed-term election date and also changed the number of members. There will be 107 members standing in the election on October 4, 2007. What I was saying to the class is that you've got to look at what the legislation is amending. This referendum and this citizens' assembly and in fact the student assemblies—one of the student presidents was in that class and had asked for this dialogue. I was very happy to be there and did read the select committee's report. In fact, I was familiar with the bill, of course. That bill is going for hearings because it is an important policy direction, perhaps a change. But when I looked at the bill and I pointed out what I thought were frailties in that bill, the young students asked very intelligent questions. I was quite impressed, as I am with some of the pages here. But the question they asked was, "Well, if only 30% of the people vote, but the threshold"—I pointed out in the opening definition clauses that the threshold is 60%. Now, there are some members here who get 60% of the votes cast, but there are a lot of members who don't. In fact, if you do the numbers, a lot of them have way less than 50%. That's part of this referendum issue. Trying to get more people to participate is the laudable goal, but in some fairer way to make sure you have representation from all the various bodies within the province, the mosaic of people who live in the province from different cultures, backgrounds and perspectives.

One bill that I am particularly interested in, that I've been working on, maybe ineffectively—that's a self-criticism—is Bill 68, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other portable equipment to drivers while driving on a highway. That bill is intended to draw attention in the public debate so that persons should not be driving while they're holding their phone, talking and yakking. That would include me, you and everyone else. It's about driver education. It's about taking responsibility for your actions.

Even in that debate I've said that the most growing use of technology isn't necessarily the phone; it's the on-board camera. It's the text messaging. It's searching the Internet. Some of the tools and devices today, and if you just blink your eyes—I worked in the technology sector for 10 or 15 years, and in a few years that BlackBerry or other device will be all of the electronic gadgets. It will

be the phone, the camera, the scheduler and the computer. It will be your iPod. It will be a television. It will be everything you want. In fact, many of them are today. The new BlackBerry device has many of those. It has an iPod in it, and that's the future. Those distractions—the debate is not just about the cellphone: the debate is about driver responsibility, about modifying driver education so that people recognize that the privilege of driving is tied to some regulatory oversight.

That would be what's appropriate, no different than the debate held for many years on the impaired driving issue. Quite frankly, whether it's 0.08, 0.05 or zero tolerance, whatever the debate, it serves the initial purpose to educate the public—not just members here, but the broader public.

All I'm saying here is that in these debates, whether it's on the current issue of Bill 173 or the current issues before the Legislature on some of the bills I've mentioned, take the time and get it right.

I look at some of the other bills. Another one here, very commendable, is Ms. DiNovo's Bill 150, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act—this is also before the standing committee on estimates—about trying to find an appropriate time. I wouldn't mind her bill getting time if my bill gets time. It's up to the House leaders to work this kind of stuff out.

As I'm looking here, another very, very good bill that I think deserves some attention here, under the standing committee on justice policy—I'm going to read three or four bills here. They're all from different sectors. In fact, one of the minister's bills is here. This is Bill 3, An Act to amend the Public Transportation Highway Improvement Act with respect to the assistance that the Minister provides to municipalities. This was moved by Mr. Yakabuski, whose father served many years here. He's very committed to the Ottawa Valley community and he recognized one of the seniors there today. Bill 3 is referred to that committee and there it sits. Bill 4—Mr. Mauro's, who I believe is from the Thunder Bay area—An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act.

1700

Bill 60, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 to regulate the promotion and advertising of Internet gaming in Ontario, is another bill that was introduced by Mr. Leal. In fact, you could say that we just dealt with a bill on consumer protection, Bill 152. There was an aspect of Internet gambling in that bill and there may be some suggestion of Mr. Leal's influence as a member of the government side—inside baseball, if you will; I've used that term on some occasions. I believe very strongly in that, protecting young people. In fact, there were questions raised yesterday in members' statements about persons, young people especially—not the gaming part but the whole Internet issue. Those Internet issues are emerging issues, they are new issues. There needs to be policy leadership involved in this debate on issues specific to the technology sector.

I would say that the minister has an important bill. I don't know where it is, but I'm going to watch this bill,

because it's kind of tied to Bill 14, which is the Access to Justice Act. But this is Bill 103, An Act to establish an Independent Police Review Director and create a new public complaints process by amending the Police Services Act. That thing has been sitting there and it's been in this House for a couple of years. I could almost bet that if you look at the Legislature now—we're going to be finished some time in the next couple of weeks, maybe a couple of days. Who knows? The chief government whip is smiling, because he may know; he may not, though. I don't know. But at least he's in a good mood, which is good. But that bill is an example, if we don't come back here—we're not coming back, I believe, until March 19. In the intersession there will be hearings. There will be four or five committees. There was a motion filed today by the government House leader saying that there were going to be several committees permitted to sit. Our finance critic is excited, I'm sure, that the finance and economic affairs committee will be meeting for a couple of months across the province. He'll probably be in Timmins and Timbuktu and all the other places—

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Kenora.

Mr. O'Toole: And Kenora. He loves travelling north in the winter. He loves the outdoors. He loves the cold.

But on a more serious note, that budget discussion—important, no question. I've done it for several years, enjoy it, and I'll try to join him on that committee. But Legislative Assembly is going to deal with Bill 155, and government agencies is permitted to sit, as well as the public accounts committee. Norm Sterling will be happy to hear that, because he's sat on public accounts for some time.

The other part that I did want to mention in the very brief time that I have left here is the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. This is more of a technical bill. I think—but I know some members may not—that it's absolutely critical; in fact, it's quite controversial, although it's public safety. Mrs. Jeffrey introduced Bill 2, An Act to amend the Building Code Act, 1992 respecting home fire sprinklers. That bill would conceivably save lives, and it would also conceivably up the price of houses, because eventually the builders aren't just going to plug one in for free, but I think—

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Maybe reduce insurance.

Mr. O'Toole: There is a good point being made, and the point is made by the insurance industry: As with the people who use anti-theft devices in their cars, they get a consideration on their insurance premium.

So there are ways, if the debate is held, where the public is first educated and members themselves are educated. In fact, the policy implications, if the minister is actually listening—it can actually be implemented in a respectful and timely manner.

The debate is about time allocation. I understand that. The debate, specifically, is something that we'll probably be hearing more about, if we're not already, each day. I would only say that there are a couple of more minutes so

I do have a couple of other bills myself, without trying to point fingers. But there is the one act that I think is going to be the concluding remark. I'm looking to the member for Erie-Lincoln, who might tell me. What's the bill number? Is it 143—the Homestead Act?

Mr. Hudak: It's 75.

Mr. O'Toole: It's 175?

Mr. Hudak: No, 75.

Mr. O'Toole: Oh, my goodness, I missed it. I leaped over it without really giving it—Bill 75 is the Homestead Act. This act demonstrates the point I've been trying to make rather relentlessly here: The minister was listening, because the very next day, roughly, he froze the Assessment Act. He froze the assessment, that whole process now. The fact is, they've frozen it at a time when they are the highest in history. So I think I might save a minute or two for the member for Erie-Lincoln, who may want to—I know he's engaged now.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: In fact, he's engaged, all right; he's engaged in a whole different issue.

But that bill, members here would know, is one of the more serious issues for persons on fixed income, seniors, and with the whole housing market on a kind of upward rise. The public should be well aware that what he was trying to do is to provide some certainty and stability in this very volatile area of public policy, the current value assessment issue. I believe it is a responsible thing to do. But the government's response is to put a moratorium on it for a couple of years and wait for the firecracker in two years when your assessment goes from 200—

Mr. Hudak: Triple whammy.

Mr. O'Toole: It's called the triple whammy. It's like double-dipping, in a way—

Mr. Hudak: Triple-dipping.

Mr. O'Toole: Triple-dipping. That's the whole point of the very little time I've had to discuss on this time allocation. These are just examples from all sides of the House of well-intended, considered and thoughtful private members' bills or resolutions. And I'm waiting for Mr. Tory's speech tomorrow on the whole issue of people out of jail when they should be in jail. That should be interesting. The courts have decided—I would say that—

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Be careful; remember the Runciman ruling.

Mr. O'Toole: No, there are no names being mentioned. What it's saying is, if the courts determined—like what Mr. Ouellette said today: A person with nine convictions, a known pedophile—these are convictions—served, I believe, nine weeks or nine months of house arrest. It's just unacceptable. So I'd encourage members to participate in the debate and listen carefully, because often good comments are made.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the brief remarks I've been allowed.

Ms. Horwath: I certainly am pleased to join the debate on the motion for closure of debate on Bill 173. It's interesting, because I just happened to have the chance to speak to the actual bill yesterday, so there

aren't too many things that I really needed to add to my remarks.

Yesterday when I was making my remarks on the bill, I was looking frantically for an article from the Spectator because there was something in it that I really wanted to share. Unfortunately, it wasn't in my package of various notes. So I went back and got it because I thought it was something that people might get a chuckle out of, the same way that I did. Yesterday I was reflecting on some of the editorial comments that have come forward in the Hamilton Spectator and spent some time talking about an article by Howard Elliott that talked about the ways that the government could have perhaps brought a raise forward that was more palatable and more appropriate in terms of what people in the province of Ontario were willing to accept. In fact, I made the point yesterday that many people actually are—and I've certainly received maybe not hundreds, but at the very least dozens and dozens and dozens of calls—

Mr. Kormos: Scores.

Ms. Horwath: "Scores" is a better word, Mr. Kormos. I can rely on my friend from Niagara Centre for a better word. Nonetheless, the article I was looking for was the next piece in the analysis, because we've heard from a number of members from the government side and from the official opposition who talk about how the increased salary is going to increase the quality of members that run for office and therefore the quality of members around this chamber.

So the article actually reminds me—when I was on regional council for the city of Hamilton, the regional municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth prior to amalgamation, there was a woman who served there, and I just went over and asked my friend Ted McMeekin from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot a question about her because I was trying to make sure I get the stats right on this woman. Her name was Ann Sloat. Ann had served as the mayor and deputy mayor of Ancaster. I got to know her when she was on regional council with me in that capacity, as I was a city representative and she was from Ancaster as a representative on regional council.

Ann used to say—she was a no-bones-about-it type of woman. Mr. McMeekin, my friend from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, reminded me—in fact, informed me, because I didn't know this—that Ann Sloat actually sat in this chamber for four days. She prides herself on the fact that she's the shortest-serving member of this Legislature. That's what Ted tells me, and I don't know if that's true or not, but that's certainly something that he told me about.

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But nonetheless, when Ann would come to these council meetings and listen to what she would describe as things that are a little bit suspicious, that didn't pass the smell test, she would shake her head and say, "You guys just send me into fits of girlish giggles." Well, if you saw Ann Sloat and heard some of the things she used to say, she was a no-bones-about-her woman. She was a very down-to-earth and a very clear woman in thought. When

she used to say that things sent her into fits of girlish giggles, it just brings to mind a vision of total balderdash in terms of what she would be describing as sending her into fits of girlish giggles.

When I read this article by well-known opinion columnist Andrew Dreschel in the *Spectator*—a person who has certainly a very wry way about his wit, a very satirical and sometimes merciless wit as he describes the various goings-on in the political realm in the city of Hamilton. Here's how he describes this idea, this supposition that a higher salary is going to translate into a better quality member:

"But even if you ignore the hoggish numbers, the arguments"—these are Andrew Dreschel's words—"that a bigger take-home cheque will either deter MPPs from running federally or attract better candidates is nothing but bilge water.

"Politics at any level will always appeal to the same kinds of people.

"You'll always get those who can't hack it elsewhere.

"Those who love the cut and thrust of a council chamber or Legislature.

"The idealists and the powermongers.

"Those who get off on possessing inside information.

"Policy wonks. Glad-handing geeks. The hard-headed and the soft-hearted.

"Forget the platitudes and party smokescreens. Obscene salary hikes only ensure that politicians will be better paid, not of a better calibre."

I have to say, when I read that article, I did dissolve into a fit of girlish giggles, because he very succinctly put how many people were feeling, although I don't think many people in Ontario, certainly not the ones who have called me, find this to be a laughing matter whatsoever.

There are a number of people who have written letters to the editor of our illustrious *Spectator* in Hamilton. I'm not going to read them out loud, but I did want to make the point that the members of the government side continue to raise the idea here that one of our local federal members is supporting their move. In fact, that's not exactly quite the case. My discussions with that federal member are very clear that a theoretical discussion—much before this particular move was made by this McGuinty Liberal government to increase the salaries by such a huge amount all in one fell swoop—took place in which the member for Hamilton Centre, David Christopherson, indicated that perhaps it would be appropriate to increase their salaries. In fact, since this move came in by the government, he has indicated to me that he thinks certainly the NDP caucus and myself personally are doing exactly the right thing in the position we're taking in regards to this move by the McGuinty Liberal government to increase salaries by such a huge amount in one fell swoop.

I have received, again, scores of letters and e-mails. I was hoping to read some of them into the record today, but I know that my friend from Niagara Centre is wanting to raise some issues himself today, so I will avoid doing that.

I do want to take the time, though, to thank all those people who have called me and who have voiced their thoughts—in most cases their anger, their concern. I know that for the most part, as I said yesterday, many of them are quite willing to say that a reasonable increase is something that should be expected and supported, but they don't see this as being reasonable. So I just want to thank them for having taken the time to pick up the phone and put their thoughts and their concerns at least on record with me, and some of them also through the editorial pages of our local newspaper.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the closure motion, and really to the bill.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): First, before we move to the time allocation motion, I want to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, Speaker, along with the table clerks, who work diligently all the time. I didn't see them wear the hats today. I'm a little disappointed, but we'll get that tomorrow. Anyway, Merry Christmas to my colleagues and Happy New Year, and the best to each and every one of you during the break.

Time allocation: We talked about this before. The leader of the third party wants to talk to us about context, and that's the new theme that each one of them wants to do, put things into context. I tried to do that once before, and now I'll do it again.

The time allocation is being condemned—a little bit by both opposition parties, actually—but, as we heard, the trend was set. The first time this type of time allocation was used to squash debate it was by the NDP. They used time allocation five times more than the previous Liberal government did under David Peterson. There were absolutely no public hearings when the NDP gave us the social contract, no time was allocated for third reading—none—and there were no public hearings.

Here's the one that gets me a little bit, because they get on their high horse about gas prices: There were no public hearings when the NDP raised the gas tax 3.4 cents a litre—raised the gas tax 3.4 cents a litre, with no public hearings. Do you know what I hear? I hear the glass breaking from a stone being thrown. This attitude that they've got us in a corner and that they've done nothing that's anything close to what they profess only we are doing is unbelievable; the fact that they've done these things and then turn around and say that we're the only ones who do these reprehensible things in this place. There are no reprehensible things being done in this place except for the fact that each of us is challenged to try to come up with the best legislation, and each government is challenged to come up with the best pieces of legislation they can to help guide our province to prosperity.

The other characterization that was made that I think is unfair is—let's ask some simple questions in this time allocation situation. If Bill 173 did not exist, would there still be layoffs? Would there still be plant closures? Would there still be difficult times? Would there still be child poverty? Would there still be anything else that we

continue to work towards to try to improve the lot of everyone in Ontario? I think we know the answer to that.

Is it something that we should be working towards collectively, multi-tasking and trying to move towards all of the issues that we've tried to set forth? Can you say that there's one issue that we should stop everything and do it for? No, we continue to work on all these other issues. There continue to be champions—not just in this House—of child poverty, welfare, jobs being lost, legislation being passed to try to help to employ people.

One last comment that I would make is that in a 16-year average—here's something I did a little bit of work on—the annual pay increase, cumulatively, was 5.8%. That means a 0.3% increase a year for 16 years. Now, let's add the 17th year, as we're fond of being reminded, and I'll even take the highest number that's being referenced—30%. So if we add that in, over a 17-year period that's a 2.8% increase per annum. I think in terms of context, let's make sure it's in the right context, because in those 16 years there were two decreases in pay of 5% each. There was a freeze for a vast number of the rest of the years, and then cost-of-living increases to that point. In terms of context, let's be fair with the analogy of a 17-year period, a 2.8% increase per annum over 17 years.

I leave on a positive note. I said it today, and I'll say it again today, I am so happy for the riding of Brant, because in the hard work that MPPs have done across their riding I was proud to announce that yesterday the Minister of Health came into the riding of Brant and made an important announcement that our entire community—our entire community and even beyond—was asking for since 1999, and that was an MRI. We got our MRI, and that means an awful lot in our community. That means one more thing that is a commitment that this government has said and will continue to do, and that is to bring down wait times. We're going to help Hamilton with this announcement because it's going to help Hamilton with its wait time. It's going to help the people in Brantford to stop travelling to Hamilton and also help Hamilton with the wait times in getting an MRI. I'm very proud of that, and I support this time allocation motion. Thank you very much.

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M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Je veux prendre l'opportunité de mettre une couple de mots sur ce débat faisant affaire avec cette motion d'attribution de temps.

Écoutez, il n'y a pas un temps dans cette Assemblée, y inclus aujourd'hui, où une allocation de temps est quelque chose dont nous, les députés, devons être fiers. D'habitude, l'idée derrière notre Parlement est de s'assurer qu'on a un débat sur n'importe quel projet de loi et que les députés qui sont intéressés à parler ont le droit de se prononcer sur un projet de loi tel que le projet de loi 173, qui donne une augmentation de salaire aux députés, ou sur n'importe quel autre projet de loi.

Depuis que je suis ici, en tant que député, toute la question d'allocation de temps est quelque chose que j'ai toujours trouvé très difficile. Je n'accepte pas à ce point-

ci que l'allocation de temps soit quelque chose que le gouvernement doit utiliser.

Je veux aussi dire qu'on a l'opportunité à travers cette motion—parce qu'on peut parler du projet de loi 173—de parler un peu des raisons pour lesquelles on est ici ce soir et comment on s'organise, d'une manière ou d'une autre, pour le vote.

Comme on le sait, aujourd'hui les membres du Nouveau Parti démocratique se sont levés pour voter contre le projet de loi à la deuxième lecture. La raison pour laquelle nous avons fait ça est très simple : c'était pour dire qu'il y a beaucoup de monde dans nos communautés qui regardent le Parlement de l'Ontario pour trouver des solutions à leurs problèmes individuels et collectifs.

On regarde, par exemple, tous les travailleurs qui ont été mis à pied au nord-est et au nord-ouest de l'Ontario : à Thunder Bay, avec Bowater; à Smooth Rock Falls, avec Tembec; et d'autres endroits. Ce monde-là nous regarde pour trouver des solutions à leurs problèmes et les réactiver dans l'emploi de leurs employeurs qui étaient là avant.

Ils regardent le gouvernement, mais ils n'entendent rien. Tout ce qu'ils entendent, c'est, « Il n'y a rien que je puisse faire. C'est le marché qui va déterminer. » On sait tous que le gouvernement peut faire quelque chose d'intéressant pour réactiver ses emplois-là au nord de la province.

Pourquoi le gouvernement ne se prononce-t-il pas sur ces questions-là du monde dans nos communautés qui ont besoin d'aide? Le gouvernement dit plutôt, « Ah, non, on va se donner une augmentation salariale. Ceux qui sont mis à pied, on ne peut rien faire. » Je dis, comme député, que ça c'est quelque chose que je ne peux pas accepter.

Je comprends que les députés travaillent fort. Je dis, premièrement et deuxièmement et troisièmement, que j'accepte que tous les députés de l'Assemblée travaillent fort. J'accepte qu'ils ont une valeur pour l'ouvrage qu'ils font. Mais on a une opportunité dans ce débat d'envoyer un message, et le message que je veux envoyer, c'est qu'il y a beaucoup de monde chez nous et à travers la province de l'Ontario qui regardent le gouvernement pour avoir de l'aide. Quand un gouvernement provincial se dit, « On est préparés à nous aider avec nos salaires » mais « non » aux autres qui ont besoin d'aide, ça passe mal.

Ça donne une opportunité de mettre en débat que ce gouvernement doit faire plus pour accepter leur responsabilité et, deuxièmement, qu'il doit prendre des actions qui peuvent avoir pour résultat des actions positives pour ce monde-là qui sont les plus démunis dans notre société. Je regarde ceux qui travaillent pour un salaire minimum. Je regarde les assistés sociaux dans notre province. Je regarde ceux qui reçoivent des pensions d'invalidité.

Quelqu'un est entré dans mon bureau de comté l'autre jour pour dire qu'avec sa pension fédérale du « Canada Pension Plan » il n'a pas eu une augmentation autre que moins de 1 % l'année passée. Comme député, c'est pas

mal difficile de dire, « Oui, je vais voter pour mon augmentation salariale » quand on a ce monde-là qui viennent dans nos bureaux.

Donc, je ne dis pas que les autres qui vont voter pour sont du monde méchant. Ce n'est pas du tout le point. Mais je pense que nous avons l'opportunité d'envoyer un message et de dire à nos citoyens, à nos commettants chez nous et aux autres dans nos comtés, « On est avec vous. On comprend que vous avez des problèmes et que vous regardez à ce gouvernement pour avoir de l'aide. Le gouvernement ne vous a pas aidé, et nous, on ne va pas nous aider avant qu'ils aident vous autres. »

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): My comments today on the time allocation motion on Bill 173 are simple. Are all MPPs created equal? The heart of parliamentary democracy is that, at heart, each and every member here is equal. There are none of us who are somehow superior to others, as MPPs. Now, there are some of us who have more responsibilities. There are some who have to govern in prose, and others who get to oppose in poetry. But at the heart, we are all created equal. It is the heart of parliamentary—my riding is no more important or less important than any other riding. I think, first, we agree on that.

I know that when this first came up, the leader of the third party said that he felt that the increase that was proposed by the Premier and supported by the leader of the official opposition was excessive. I said to myself, “Maybe he’s right. Maybe there are some members in this House who really are only worth 60% of their federal counterparts.” But then I paused and I said, “No, we are all created equal. All members are equal in this place, and all ridings are equal and deserve equal representation.”

I know that it is unparliamentary to castigate some members and to use unparliamentary terms. But I am reminded first about something that my friend the member from Lanark-Carleton, the dean of this Legislature, said. I follow this debate with quite a bit of interest. I know that he said, “Unfortunately, members of the Legislature—us, ourselves—have been very, very cynical about this whole process. Whenever a member or a person stands up about the needs of members, we attack each other. Those attacks are duly recorded in the media because they raise great attention and great relish. I have great respect for people who give their life to this Legislature and to all democratic institutions, and I believe that we can only keep the level of MPPs coming to this place up if we are willing to deal in reality with what the competing forces are.” That was stated by someone who has been in this Legislature more than any other member, and I agree with him.

I was reading in the paper, the Toronto Sun, where Christina Blizzard said, “Let’s not be hypocritical here. The NDP can rant all they like about the hike. They can pledge they’ll give it to charity. A year from now, we’ll all have forgotten those pledges. And who knows who’ll have given what to the food bank?”

The question here is very simple. We are all called to account in this place as equal members. There are some who, in this debate, I believe have practised trying to be holier-than-thou, that somehow they are more equal than others. I reject that. I know I can say, and I say to you, Mr. Speaker, when you are in your own seat—I remember the quote when you were speaking about it. You said, and I quote—you didn’t know about this, I think was what you were saying: “You can imagine my shock. You could have knocked me down—and probably you did—on that day last week when I walked into the House and one of the staff members from the NDP said, ‘Congratulations, you’re getting a huge raise today; congratulations, your pension is going up; and congratulations, the severance package is going to be enormous.’ I couldn’t believe that that was in fact what was true.”

I guess the question I ask is, why? Why, if Mr. Campbell from the Globe and Mail is right that a senior member of our government reached out to a senior member of the third party, were you not told of that? That’s the question. Why were you not told? Because you obviously have said quite clearly on the record that no one told you that two weeks before this debate happened, this was on the table amongst the parties. Maybe that’s a question you may want to take up with your leader, Mr. Speaker.

There are people here who are trying to make this issue distinctly partisan. I know other people see it from an opportunistic point of view. I believe that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. The contention from my friend from Nickel Belt that somehow I should vote in favour of this so that she has the luxury of voting against it, so that she will receive a pay raise which she will then refuse not to take, so that she can therefore give it to charity, is mendacious at best. The simple thing is, if you want to give the money to charity, vote yes, take the money, give it to charity. Don’t rely on others. I find it interesting—

Interjection.

Mr. Wilkinson: —I say to the leader of the third party, who seems to be quite interested in this, that first it was, “We’re not going to take the money.” Then it was, “We’re going to vote against the bill but take the money.” And then, “We’re not going to not take the money. We’re going to take the money and we’re going to give it to charity. But not all of us are going to give it to charity, and not all of us are going to give all of it to charity. Some of us are only going to do it between now and the end of the mandate.” And not one has stood in their place and said, “I will give the raise to charity, I will give the increase in my pension contribution to charity and I will pledge to give the severance increase to charity.” There seem to be very different levels of generosity just in one party, I say to Mr. Speaker.

1730

People talk about this raise, but they refuse to look at the question of relativity. Many of us have talked for many years about the 15 years, and I believe, if you’re being partisan, that you won’t be relative about it and I

can understand that. I believe that it's somewhat passing strange that people can insult the independent Integrity Commissioner of this place. It's convenient for them to say, "Well, the Auditor General is independent. Oh, the Ombudsman, that's independent. We believe those two guys." But when the Integrity Commissioner, an officer of this Legislature, says and writes a report for the third time, all of a sudden he has no credibility. He is never mentioned by the members who are opposed to this. How convenient that only some officers of the Legislature seem to have credibility here and there but not everywhere.

I want to say to my friend Ms. DiNovo, I quote from her directly: "First of all, I want to say that this is the time of year when all of our faiths, and I know there are at least one or two people of faith in this chamber...." I know no member who is an atheist; I know no member of this Legislature who is agnostic. I don't know whether you were trying to be funny, because if you were, you were not. I don't know whether you were trying to be sarcastic, and I know very few members of the United Church who are sarcastic from the pulpit. If you are trying to insult all of the other members in this House, you did a fine job of doing that by saying there are only one or two people of faith in this House. I find that repugnant that you would do that. Really, I would say that that would be sanctimonious.

Finally, I say, why are there some members of this House who feel that they cannot say to their supporters that they're worth this? Why? Are you worried that you cannot say to your constituents that the work you have and the work we all have is of value? Are you concerned that your stakeholders will have some problem with that? I know there are some words that are not parliamentary, but "H" is for holier than thou. "Y" is, why didn't your leader tell you about this when he had the opportunity? "P" is for people who are purely partisan. Some here are—

The Acting Speaker: I'm going to ask you not to do this, because you cannot do what you are doing to spell out a word that you cannot use here.

Mr. Wilkinson: I just want to finish because I know that I've raised many issues about the raise, about the insult, about sanctimonious people and yet another question of why. I say to the people, and all of the good grade school students, they know how to spell the word.

ROYAL ASSENT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Before recognizing further debate, I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Todd Decker): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 28, An Act to require the taking and analysing of blood samples to protect victims of crime, emergency

service workers, good Samaritans and other persons and to make consequential amendments to the Health Care Consent Act, 1996 and the Health Protection and Promotion Act / Projet de loi 28, Loi exigeant le prélèvement et l'analyse d'échantillons de sang afin de protéger les victimes d'actes criminels, le personnel des services d'urgence, les bons samaritains et d'autres personnes et apportant des modifications corrélatives à la Loi de 1996 sur le consentement aux soins de santé et à la Loi sur la protection et la promotion de la santé.

Bill 50, An Act respecting the regulation of the profession of traditional Chinese medicine, and making complementary amendments to certain Acts / Projet de loi 50, Loi concernant la réglementation de la profession de praticienne ou de praticien en médecine traditionnelle chinoise et apportant des modifications complémentaires à certaines lois.

Bill 52, An Act to amend the Education Act respecting pupil learning to the age of 18 and equivalent learning / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation concernant l'apprentissage des élèves jusqu'à l'âge de 18 ans et l'apprentissage équivalent.

Bill 65, An Act respecting mortgage brokerages, lenders and administrators / Projet de loi 65, Loi concernant les maisons de courtage d'hypothèques, les prêteurs hypothécaires et les administrateurs d'hypothèques.

Bill 107, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code / Projet de loi 107, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne.

Bill 124, An Act to provide for fair registration practices in Ontario's regulated professions / Projet de loi 124, Loi prévoyant des pratiques d'inscription équitables dans les professions réglementées de l'Ontario.

Bill 130, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 130, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

Bill 151, An Act to enact various 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 151, Loi édictant diverses mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

Bill 152, An Act to modernize various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Government Services / Projet de loi 152, Loi visant à moderniser diverses lois qui relèvent du ministère des Services gouvernementaux ou qui le touchent.

Bill 158, An Act to revise legislation relating to the public service of Ontario by repealing the Public Service Act, enacting the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2006 and the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act, 2006 and making complementary amendments to various Acts and by amending various Acts in respect of the successor rights of certain public servants / Projet de loi 158, Loi visant à réviser des lois ayant trait à la fonction publique de l'Ontario en abrogeant la Loi sur la fonction publique, en édictant la Loi de 2006 sur la fonction publique de l'Ontario et la Loi de 2006 sur la négociation collective relative à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario, en apportant des modifications complémentaires à diverses

lois et en modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la succession aux qualités pour certains fonctionnaires.

TIME ALLOCATION
ATTRIBUTION DE TEMPS
(continued / suite)

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Kormos: I never relish time allocation motions here at Queen's Park; never have. This is a particularly repugnant one. When I hear the shrill of porcine squealing coming from the government benches this afternoon, I understand their enthusiasm to shut down debate, to shut down the committee process and to ensure that this bill is called back promptly for third reading: no debate, no public consultation, no public participation.

Understand that this is a most exceptional time allocation motion, being presented after less than two sessional days of debate during which Liberals and Conservatives would not participate. They wouldn't take their place in this chamber and tell their constituents why they, Liberals and Conservatives, were prepared to give the finger to minimum wage workers here in Christmas 2006, but oh, spend an extra week at Queen's Park to use time allocation to ram through a 25% salary alone increase, and when you add up the enhanced severance package and the Parkinsonian pension deal, you've got yourself 31%. Government members say it's defensible. Then why didn't you have the guts and the gumption to defend it in committee? The porcine squealing coming from the government benches—it's the type of embarrassment that one of them has when they're caught in the porno section of the video store, but they're not embarrassed to be there the very next week on the same Friday night.

It's just too compelling. The prospect of that cash-on-bash is sufficiently luring to overcome any embarrassment that the Liberals and Conservatives might have about explaining to their constituents—their constituents are working for minimum wage here in the province of Ontario, earning \$7.75 an hour. The government grants itself a 25% salary alone increase, yet it tells minimum wage workers, "You wait until February for a mere 25-cent increase."

I had occasion to say yesterday, and I'm going to say it again, because it's true, that the people of Ontario are prepared to be very fair with their elected representatives—municipal members, provincial members, federal members, all of whom are well paid here in the province of Ontario, make no mistake about it. Folks in this province are prepared to be very fair to you. They ask that you be fair to them.

1740

How is it that the Liberals and Conservatives can drop their partisan differences, circle the wagons, hammer together this backroom deal—and oh, they would have been delighted, they would have wet their pants if the New Democrats had joined them in the exercise. It would

have been a Linda Blair moment had New Democrats participated in that late-night, backroom exercise to ram this bill through with no public viewing of it.

New Democrats used procedural motions to prevent the bill being called for second reading on either Wednesday or Thursday of last week. We did. New Democrats ensured that, notwithstanding that the Conservatives and the Liberals had no interest whatsoever—refused to, failed to. Heck, you couldn't debate the bill, and you want a salary increase? Conservatives and Liberals couldn't, wouldn't, refused to stand in their place and explain why they support this legislation, why they're prepared to sit an exceptional extra week here in the Legislature so as to fatten their wallets and to feather their nests when those minimum wage workers are told to wait, when people with disabilities on ODSP are told "It's not your time yet. It's ours; oh, yeah." You've got it made in the shade if you're an elected member at Queen's Park. Just kick away the disabled; shove them away, slam the door in their face and tell them to wait. But members of this Legislature—Conservatives and Liberals—weren't prepared to wait through the winter months for public hearings around the issue.

Social assistance recipients, most of them hungry kids, children—you know it—being told to wait; Liberals and Conservatives at Queen's Park telling moms and their kids on social assistance to wait because those Liberals and Conservatives are too busy passing legislation giving themselves an overall 31% salary/severance/pension increase. Those parents, the poorest parents in this province, who are receiving the federal child benefit—which is being clawed back to the tune of \$250 million a year by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals, notwithstanding the promise they made before the last election—are being told to wait, because Liberals and Conservatives are too darn busy at Queen's Park ramming through a bill that will fatten their wallets and feather their nests to the tune of 31%.

I am exceptionally proud of Howard Hampton and my colleagues, who made sure that there wasn't going to be any backroom deal, who made sure that the people of Ontario were going to be told about this dirty deal, who made sure that there was going to be public exposure of the contents of this dirty deal by virtue of our participation in debate here in this chamber.

And oh, the leader of the Conservative Party: Now Mr. Tory is indeed Preston Manning in Stornoway. He is no longer that breath of fresh air, is he, Mr. Leal? He's just like the others. When it came to self-interest, Mr. Tory, the leader of the Conservative Party, was prepared to hunker down in that backroom, huh, Mr. Hampton? Hunkered down in that backroom, Mr. Tory was. Why, I'd be surprised—the imagery is of John Tory and Dalton McGuinty sharing the same chocolate sundae, and Dalton saying, "No, John, you have the cherry," and John saying, "No, Dalton, I insist. You have the cherry," and Dalton saying, "No, John, you have the cherry because we're friends now, we're intimates, and this is what friends do for each other: They scratch each other's

backs." Well, there's been some back-scratching going on here. "Dalton, you scratch my back," John says, and John says, "Dalton, I'll scratch yours."

Today, Conservative leader John Tory defended the government's closure motion. John Tory, the leader of the Conservative Party, defends the cessation of debate, the termination of debate here in this chamber. John Tory, the leader of the Conservative Party, defends pulling the bill out of committee. It was in committee for all of an hour. It never even got a chance to have a sub-committee hearing to decide when the public was going to have access to it. John Tory defends the government's time allocation motion. "Listen to this," John Tory says, "I think in this case, given the timing, when we're right up against Christmas, it's appropriate to pass the bill." Right up against the wall at Christmastime, it's appropriate to rush through, use time allocation to pass a bill that fattens the wallets of John Tory, his caucus, Dalton McGuinty and his. Do you all, up against the wall at Christmastime, going to sit an extra week, want to show some compassion? Do you want to show some of the compassion that Ms. DiNovo talked about being demanded of us as people, as members of a community, as sisters, brothers, parents, neighbours?

Why wasn't there a backroom deal to increase minimum wage? Why wasn't there a backroom deal to increase ODSP, disability pension benefits? Why wasn't there a backroom deal to restore the 21%-plus cut from social assistance benefits? Why wasn't there a backroom deal to aid seniors, who in increasing numbers across this province are at risk of being homeless, of not being able to afford to live in their own homes because of electricity costs that are skyrocketing and because of pensions that are being eroded? Why weren't those backroom deals made? Why is it that the only backroom deal that was made here at Queen's Park between the Conservatives and the Liberals was a backroom deal to fatten their own wallets and to feather their own nests?

People in this province feel betrayed by you, are already hurting and feel hurt more by you. You talk about people being cynical. Damn right they are. It's precisely this sort of thing that makes them very cynical—precisely this sort of thing. There are going to be kids this Christmas in homeless shelters here in the province of Ontario. There are going to be kids this Christmas at soup kitchens here in the province of Ontario. There are going to be kids this Christmas who not only won't have any toys under a Christmas tree, but who will be eating saltine crackers and sardines for Christmas dinner—and

you've betrayed them. You've turned your back on them. You've given them the back of your hand. I say shame on every single one of you.

The Acting Speaker: The time for debate has now ended. It is now time to call the question.

Mr. Caplan has moved government motion number 286. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour will please stand and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Amott, Ted
Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Barrett, Toby
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bountrogianni, Marie
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Di Cocco, Caroline
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter

Gerretsen, John
Hudak, Tim
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy
Martiniuk, Gerry
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Mossop, Jennifer F.
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John
Oraziotti, David
Parsons, Ernie
Patten, Richard
Peters, Steve

Peterson, Tim
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sterling, Norman W.
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John
Zimmer, David

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles
DiNovo, Cheri
Hampton, Howard

Horwath, Andrea
Kormos, Peter
Martel, Shelley

Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 66; the nays are 7.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

It now being after 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 21 December 2006

Jeudi 21 décembre 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 21 December 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 21 décembre 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CITY OF GUELPH

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration should designate the city of Guelph as one of Ontario's immigrant gateway cities so that Guelph can be marketed provincially and internationally as an immigrant gateway to enable Guelph to attract the investment and jobs which will ensure its future prosperity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Sandals has moved private member's notice of motion number 42. Pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes, Mrs. Sandals.

Mrs. Sandals: As you know, Speaker, the rules of order of the House do not allow us to actually print the whereases, so I would like to start by putting the whereases into the record, which will give people a little context for the motion and perhaps help the opposition people in where we're going here.

"Whereas the provincial government has adopted an immigrant gateway strategy which designates various cities as regional immigrant destinations for immigrant settlement and immigrant investors;

"Whereas Guelph is internationally recognized as a centre of agriculture and biotechnology innovation, Guelph is a key centre for Ontario's auto parts manufacturing industry and Guelph is already home to a strong and diverse multicultural population;

"Therefore be it resolved that the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration designate the city of Guelph as one of Ontario's immigrant gateway cities."

That will give you a little bit of understanding, but we maybe need to first look at, what is an immigrant gateway? Under the Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, we have a strategy to involve municipalities in the regional marketing of immigration destinations, of trying to, I suppose, in some ways influence the immigration patterns within this province by giving immigrants information about different regions of the province. This enables municipalities and regions to put information on a website that is internationally marketed jointly by the Ontario government and the Canadian government, that

gives information about a region—its opportunities, both investment opportunities and opportunities for individual immigrants; what the strengths, interests and economic concerns are in the region; what services are available—all the information a newcomer to Ontario might be interested in in terms of locating where they want to move.

What's interesting is that the five pilot sites for this program are all what we would think of as large urban centres: Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor-Essex, London and Sudbury. I'm not saying that's a bad thing; in fact, we want to attract immigrants to all those regions of the province. But it is noteworthy that all those centres are large urban centres.

Ontario welcomed more than 140,000 immigrants last year, more than any other province. Currently, immigration accounts for an estimated 70% of Ontario's net labour force growth, and it will account for all of the net labour force growth within the next five years in Ontario, so this whole issue of immigrant settlement patterns becomes quite important. It is important for us to think not just about urban centres but also maybe to change the attitude that says immigrants go to urban centres and start to think about how we can attract immigrants to the rest of the province.

The average age, particularly when you get outside of urban areas, is going up; the birth rate, everywhere in the province, is going down; and immigration becomes really key to any region's economic prosperity.

One of my hats, with my current position as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, has been looking at education funding. As we've talked to stakeholders over the last month, one of the issues that has been consistently identified is how we deal with declining enrolment, because almost every school board in the entire province actually has declining enrolment at the elementary level. Even the Toronto boards, which we think of as benefiting from a lot of immigration—and they do—also appear to be benefiting from a lot of young urban professionals who don't have kids at all. So when you bring it all out in the wash, even the Toronto boards have elementary enrolments that are in decline. So this whole issue around where people go and how our population is going to grow in the future becomes very, very important.

I'm going to ask my colleague, Deb Matthews from London, to speak to this a little more fully. I know and many of my colleagues know, but the viewers would not be aware, that Deb, along with being an MPP and the past president of the Ontario Liberal Party, decided to

play superwoman and has completed her Ph.D. while sitting in the House. The newly minted Dr. Matthews's area of study is actually immigration settlement patterns, the study of demographics. So she's going to speak in more detail about that, as it is provincially.

But I'd like to talk a little about the city of Guelph. We are pushing 120,000 in population. Of the mid-sized urban cities—that is, in Stats Canada's definition, 100,000 to 200,000—we're the fifth-largest when it comes to the growth of mid-sized urban centres in Ontario. But what most people don't know is that if you look at the percentage of immigrants in the population, Guelph is actually placed 11th in the entire country. That doesn't occur to most people when they think about Guelph. Almost one in five people in Guelph, 19.8% of its population, are immigrants. In fact, that's more than the average in Ontario. If you look at perceptions, Guelph has a higher proportion of immigrants than places like London, but also Montreal, Edmonton or even Winnipeg, which we might have thought of traditionally as an immigrant centre.

1010

Guelph is much more a traditional immigration centre than many of the much larger cities in the country. It has quite an interesting mix of immigrants. Historically Guelph was settled by the Anglos, so the Scots and the English and the Irish are obviously represented quite handily in Guelph's population. Those were the founding fathers, if you will. But if you look at significant visible minority groups in Guelph, you would see walking around the streets of Guelph these days people from China, people from South Asia, a black community, a Filipino community, a Southeast Asian community, largely Vietnamese—a real mix of people. If you look at other groups, given the influence of Kitchener, which is a near neighbour, there's a lot of German population, and Guelph has a huge Italian population. In fact, the first destination of the family of our Minister of Finance, Mr. Sorbara, was Guelph. Some of them then moved to the GTA, but first of all they came to Guelph.

There's a village in southern Italy, in the Calabria region, by the name of San Giorgio. If you were to check, I think you would find that there are probably more people in Guelph with family roots in San Giorgio than in San Giorgio itself. A huge number of people from this village over a matter of a few decades all moved to Guelph. So historically, the Italian community in Guelph has played a huge role in the development of Guelph and a very significant role in our cultural mix. We also have significant Dutch and Polish and Ukrainian and Hungarian, so a variety of European groups.

More lately, we've seen a lot of Vietnamese. There's a huge Vietnamese community in Guelph. It probably started around the time of the boat people. It's sort of an odd welding of auto parts manufacturing and the Vietnamese, as the word got out that if you were coming from Vietnam, you could get a job in Guelph's growing auto parts sector. In fact, we have quite a significant

number of people who come from Vietnam originally and work in the auto parts sector.

Guelph has a wonderful mix already. I'm not suggesting that Guelph should be the only community designated as an immigration centre, an immigration gateway, an immigration portal, but I think it could be the first of many medium-sized cities to start to massage the immigration patterns in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to rise this morning and participate in the debate on the resolution brought forward by the member from Guelph–Wellington to discuss that the city of Guelph be designated as an immigration gateway city in Ontario. I will be sharing my time with the PC caucus member from Halton, who is fully eager to speak to this resolution as well.

The city of Guelph is a wonderful city. The member from Guelph–Wellington is very proud, as she should be, of the city she is from and represents. I have been to Guelph many times. It has a wonderful agricultural base, an industry I am quite familiar with in my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock in that we have the third-largest agriculture industry base in Ontario. Guelph is also a thriving base for automotive and related industries and of course is a strong engineering base. We can't forget the university either. All of this comes together. As the member has said in this resolution, it's trying to tie more of the threads together to make it a gateway.

In my riding, Fleming College—it used to be called Sir Sandford Fleming College; now it's Fleming College—has been working to attract new immigrants and people from the city to come and take the community college courses they offer, which I think is a very aggressive approach, a progressive approach. My riding is predominantly rural and, being a nurse at the local hospital in Lindsay, I see a lot of new immigrant doctors who are able to come, and we are very happy that they chose to come to our area and settle there.

So I certainly support the principle of this resolution for a number of reasons. John Tory and the PC caucus recognize the contributions that the immigrants to Ontario make to our province. They form a huge part of what makes Ontario a cultural, diverse, economic and welcoming province.

Just a few weeks ago, back in November, John Tory brought forward a discussion paper called Time for Action. In that paper, there are a number of areas with respect to working to meet expectations and fulfill responsibilities for Ontario's skilled immigrants. The fact of the matter—which quite embarrasses me, being a provincial member and just part of the whole country of Canada—is that we're definitely failing in our obligations to skilled immigrant who've come to Ontario. We have to do a much, much better job for them.

Most of us have tons of stories. We've met the qualified doctor, the engineer, the specialist in a field, working in an area where their talents and qualifications are simply not being challenged. Many newcomers to Ontario

are experienced in high-demand areas such as medicine or engineering, but without experience in Canada, are unable to find work in their area of credential. There are far too many cases—where immigrants come to Canada with skills and struggle just to support their families and who can't go into the field they were trained in and add to Ontario all the skills they attained in their country of origin.

The plan we've brought forward is thoughtful and well consulted. It has been spoken about within our party for many, many years. We need to speed the process up. We have to provide assistance to newcomers long before they actually arrive and touch Ontario's soil, and that's what we're failing to do. Their expectations are high, but they come here and are on social systems. I'm embarrassed that that occurs. They have to wait for extraordinarily long periods of time to enter the country, and then they come and can't go into the field they have been trained to work in. It's important and it makes good sense that we start to accredit these future Ontarians before they arrive. We need to do that in the country they're from.

The Time for Action plan will help immigrants, in their country of origin, with English courses, bridging courses, online training. And once they're here, we then have the obligation to help immigrants and their families to ensure they're prepared for the better life they intended. That's why they chose Ontario to be the place they live, raise their families and work and contribute to society.

Newcomers need that assistance as quickly as possible when they get here, which is why I appreciate the member from Guelph–Wellington's resolution today. The plan we've brought forward will expand OSAP to include 500 skilled immigrants each and every year. It also increases support for English as a second language. It's also of vital importance that we help these immigrants enter the workforce and contribute, through taking advantage of their skills, credentials and experience.

This relates to what we're debating this morning and the relationship this motion has with establishing a base where immigrants can enter the workforce as smoothly and as quickly as possible. Lowering the barriers and the obstacles is key to helping skilled immigrants integrate themselves into the workforce and into society: establishing doctor-assisted programs and career mentoring programs, and ensuring that the funding intended for settlement and integration for newcomers actually goes to what it is intended for.

One of the major factors that relates to the issues around immigration and newcomers to Ontario is underemployment. It's the obligation of the government to ensure that opportunities are provided for immigrants to not only want to come to this great province but to want to come here because they know they'll have the opportunity to use their expertise and contribute in a positive way.

Although I think I understand the concept of the gateway city, I'm not 100% clear, but I think it's more like a pilot project that the member from Guelph has offered.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): What about Brian Desbiens and the Order of Ontario? Work that in.

Ms. Scott: The member from Peterborough makes a very good point. The past president of Fleming College, which is in Peterborough but also has campuses in Lindsay, the Frost campus, and in Haliburton and Cobourg, received the Order of Ontario last night. We are both very proud of Brian Desbiens for receiving the Order of Ontario. It was well deserved, for the contribution he has made to many of our communities throughout both of our ridings and to the whole province of Ontario. He was also chair of the Frost working committee, which was instrumental in getting the Frost Centre, we hope, open by June 2007, and I know he was chair of the Peterborough flood relief committee also—just two of the things that Brian Desbiens has done throughout his life to contribute back to his community. So the Order of Ontario that he received last night was a well-deserved award for Brian Desbiens. Thank you, Jeff.

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Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): You're wrapping up?

Ms. Scott: I'm wrapping up because my colleague from Halton wants to participate in this debate.

The resolution from the member from Guelph–Wellington is timely and good. We need to make sure that immigrants get as qualified and as much support before they leave their country of origin, that we integrate them as quickly as possible into Ontario, get them using the skills they want and get them on track for the better life that they came to this province for.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's a pleasure to speak to Ms. Sandals's resolution here. Certainly one can commend her standing up for her community. I just want to say. I know this may be our last day together this year, and we all do our best to stand up for our constituents and our communities; I do believe that. So she's standing up for Guelph and all things Guelph and what is best for Guelph. But I'd like to say that perhaps there are some ways in which this member and all of us could stand up for Guelph and other centres in Ontario a little bit better than declaring them as gateways.

To that effect, I want to throw on the record a few comments about the auto sector community in Guelph. The member raised the auto parts sector community in Guelph and how it was doing. In some ways it's not doing that well. This is like other centres where workers are facing layoffs under the McGuinty government. Unfortunately, losing good-paying jobs in the auto parts sector has become commonplace under this government, as thousands of workers have been laid off, including 25 workers as a consequence of Guelph's Dana plant closing, and the recent news that Linamar is laying off workers as well. It's particularly distressing that less than six months after the Premier committed \$44 million to Linamar for their expansion plans, Linamar is contracting out and laying off workers. Of course, we know that under the McGuinty government the manufacturing

sector has lost 136,000 such jobs, so Guelph is not alone in that aspect.

I just wanted to read into the record from the Associated Press about Dana Corp. closing two plants in Canada and one each in Missouri and Indiana, eliminating a total of 440 jobs—and guess where they're moving production? They're moving production to Mexico. "Four other plants, expected to close within the next two years, will be identified some time next year"—

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Parkdale—High Park, I think it's time you got back to the resolution.

Ms. DiNovo: Happily, Mr. Speaker, I will get back to the resolution. I understand that this member is standing up for her community, and that's what I'm hoping to do as well, to stand up for her constituents in Guelph, for their jobs and for their well-being, because after all, it's a wonderful place. In fact, the University of Guelph is one of the better universities in Ontario; we know that. It's one of the prettier places, too, I must say.

However, we do want to look at the plight of workers in Guelph. The plight of workers in Guelph is somewhat similar to the plight of workers across this province. About 25% of them are paid poverty wages of \$10 or less; about 31% of Guelph workers—women and people of colour—are found in exactly those jobs that pay less than \$10, and this government, the McGuinty Liberals, have failed those people, those constituents of Guelph, in a number of ways. This is one of them: They have failed to raise their wages. They're earning minimum wage, if they're on minimum wage, of \$7.75 an hour. The McGuinty government has said they'll raise that to \$8. Of course, that's not enough; it's not even the poverty line. So if you really wanted to do the workers in Guelph a favour at this time of year, the first thing the McGuinty Liberal government would do would be to raise the wages of those who are poorest among them. Of the workers in Guelph, 37%—we know this from Ontario statistics—

The Deputy Speaker: I know how difficult it is, but it's my job to keep you on topic. I haven't heard the word "immigration" in some time.

Ms. DiNovo: You're about to hear it, Mr. Speaker; you're about to hear it. In terms of speaking about the Guelph immigration, I was pleased to hear the number of immigrants in Guelph. I come from an area that has the most number of immigrants of anywhere in North America—Parkdale—High Park—so I know exactly whereof I speak when I speak about the plight of immigrants.

We have had Bill 124—and we know that we're both dealing with the same kind of crises of immigrants getting jobs: a Ph.D. doing Pizza Hut delivery. We've heard the jokes. We know what it means to be a recent immigrant.

Again, I think what this government could do to help the immigrants settling in Guelph, better than perhaps naming this a gateway city, is to give some teeth to Bill 124. How might they do that? They might do that by building an appeal process so that the workers who are

immigrants in Guelph could appeal the rulings that deal with their plight in terms of getting regulated.

Ms. Sandals probably has some immigrants among her constituents who are doctors and engineers and would like to get accreditation in Ontario. Naming Guelph as a gateway city is not going to help them do that. What's going to help them do that is to streamline the process to their getting that accreditation. Again, what I'm hoping for is that this government across from us actually does do what's needed for the constituents in Ms. Sandals's riding, does do what's helpful for immigrants in Guelph and actually beefs up Bill 124 so that they might become the doctors and the engineers that they were back in their home countries. There's another way in which this government could help the residents of Guelph.

I'm going to let my colleague speak about some other problems with this resolution as well.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I have to say that I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak to this. As the member from Guelph—Wellington mentioned, this is actually an area in which I have some expertise, having completed my doctorate on this very topic earlier this year.

I'm going to be sharing my time—it's going to be difficult for me to keep this little lecture down to the seven minutes I have been allocated. University professors are used to speaking in 50-minute spans of time, so I'm going to have to keep myself really focused here.

This is a very important demographic issue, not just for Guelph and for my community of London but for many communities in the province and across the country.

We have a wonderful culture of immigration in Canada. We're the envy of every other country in the world because of the way we attract and integrate immigrants into our country. We have a long way to go—we could do so much better than we do—but across the globe, people do look to Canada when they're studying immigration.

However, there's a very unbalanced settlement pattern across the country. We have a few cities that attract a lot of immigrants, but most of our cities attract less than our per capita share. This is an important issue because—and this is where I'll move into the lecture mode—fertility rates in Canada and throughout the developed world have been at below replacement rates for many decades now. In Canada, we went below the replacement rate of an average of 2.1 children per woman, one for the woman and one for the man and an extra 0.1 to—I won't go into that. But 2.1 is the replacement rate, and we are currently at 1.5 and seem to be stabilizing at around 1.5. What that means is, over the short term, we see the population aging. I think everyone here and everyone watching is very familiar with the notion that our population is aging. We're focused on some of the implications.

What I don't think people really understand is that we can foresee the time in which there will actually be more deaths than births. Demographers call that "natural decrease." At that point in time—expect it to be 20-or-

some-odd years from now—we actually will not only look to immigrants to increase our population, but without immigration our population will decline quite rapidly.

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At current fertility rates, every generation is only three-quarters the size of the previous generation. So Canadians—we're not replacing ourselves through fertility. Some countries have tried very hard to increase fertility, with not very good results. They haven't achieved those objectives. Immigration is how we will be replacing our population in the future.

I might say that there's no shortage of people in the world. The population of the globe is continuing to increase, in some parts of the world very dramatically; so our job, as Canadians, as global citizens, is to attract and integrate immigrants into our communities.

When you have a fertility rate well below replacement, immigration is how you replace the population. At the national level, we're really well-positioned. We can simply increase levels of immigration to compensate for below-replacement fertility. In fact, even at current levels of immigration, the population of Canada, unlike many European countries and Japan and other developed countries, is projected to increase, albeit at decreasing rates, over the next 50 years. But because of the unbalanced settlement patterns, what we'll have is: The cities that attract immigrants will grow rapidly; the cities that do not attract immigrants will decline rapidly.

For my doctoral thesis, I looked at population projections for 26 CMAs in Canada. A CMA is a census metropolitan area. The results were surprising to me and have been surprising to a lot of people. Fifty years from now—and everybody has to understand that these are projections based on everything staying the same, which of course we know it won't—if nothing changes, of the 26 largest metropolitan areas in Canada, only 10 will still be growing. Sixteen will have populations that are actually decreasing in size.

We're not used to thinking about cities getting smaller, but in fact, 16 of the 26 will be getting smaller and 12 will be smaller 50 years from now than they are today. That is, in very large part, driven by their inability to attract immigrants. There are other factors: the age structure of their population and internal migration; people leaving. Our friends in the north know that's an issue for those cities.

Unless we can move to a more balanced distribution of immigrants, we are going to be facing some real inequities. We'll have some rapidly growing cities, with demand for increasing infrastructure and services, and we'll have another class of cities that will actually have surplus infrastructure. We're seeing it now in schools, where there are more classroom spaces than there are students.

There's a city in Germany—and I'll wrap up very soon.

Mr. Leal: No, keep going; keep going. This is valuable information.

Ms. Matthews: There's a city in Germany—Cottbus, Germany—which has declined from about 130,000 to

100,000 people because they don't attract immigrants and they have a low fertility rate. They're actually having to replace the water mains in the city because there's not enough water being used by the reduced number of people in the community. So there is a cost to population decline. In the literature they call this "population shrinkage," and many places in Europe and other parts of the developed world are having to deal with shrinkage, something that is not on the radar screen of too many people in Canada.

Unless we can move to a more balanced distribution—and I applaud the member's initiative, standing up for her community. But many of us need to—

Interjection.

Ms. Matthews: I've been asked by the member to keep going. I could talk for hours on this topic. In fairness to my colleagues who do have something to say, I will now conclude my remarks. But congratulations to the member for really recognizing an issue in her community.

Mr. Chudleigh: We're busy over here dividing up the Christmas gifts from Mr. Levac to the pages. It's not that we don't appreciate the Christmas gifts, it's just that the pages seem to appreciate them more than we do. They like candies. They're of the age when candies can still be eaten without the obvious results on the waistline.

It's an interesting resolution that we're debating today. Immigration, of course, is essential to the economic well-being of Ontario and Canada, and indeed any country. I think we have a wonderful example of what happens when you don't have immigration or when you don't have population growth. Japan was one of the few countries, if not the only country, that didn't have a baby boom after the Second World War, and the depopulation of Japan can be traced directly—if you follow the teachings of David Foote in Boom, Bust and Echo, you will see that the population's decline in Japan led directly to the 10- or 15-year recession that they've had in Japan. They've had zero growth or very low growth over an extended period of time because their population has not increased and hasn't kept up with the demands.

However, I think this resolution is just a titch off centre. It's a little bit wrong-headed. We're talking about placing people in various towns around Ontario, and I think that's going at the problem backwards. What you have to do is create the jobs. People follow jobs; I don't think jobs follow people. So creating jobs in various parts of Ontario, decentralizing Ontario's job-creation engine, which is currently in the GTA, is where the solution to the creation of higher populations in these various outlying cities and towns around Ontario, outlying from the GTA—is where the success of that will lie.

If you look at the current exodus from practically all regions of Canada towards Alberta, you will see that people do follow jobs. To use the member's own example of San Giorgio, I don't think those people moved to Guelph in order to sit in their homes; I think those people moved from San Giorgio, Italy, to the city of Guelph because there were jobs there. The creation of

those jobs is what is going to create the economic opportunity for these people and the decentralization of the job growth across Ontario.

Our leader and our party have introduced a white paper, one in a series called *A Time for Action*, talking about Ontario's skilled immigrants. It's entitled *Unmet Expectations, Unfulfilled Responsibilities* and it talks to this very subject, that immigrants who come to this country aren't given the kinds of jobs that they perhaps expected when they left their homes. It's a tremendous uprooting of a person's life, that someone would move across the world and settle somewhere and then find that the credentials they have at home don't necessarily meet with the standards that we have in this country. That is something they should know about before they leave home, before they consider the uprooting experience they have gone through in their lives.

The Guelph area is one that is rich in research and innovation. I was actually somewhat shocked last week when the Premier, who is also the Minister of Research and Innovation, stood and talked about the need for research and innovation in the future of this province and how we should attract the brightest and best from around the world. I was shocked and amazed actually, because it was one of the few things the Premier said in three and a half years of being here that I agreed with. It's certainly headed in the right direction, if that was his thought. Yet you can imagine my disappointment when very shortly down the road from that, a couple of days later, we found out that this government, through the Premier's office, is thinking about selling off the Turfgrass Institute. But that not being enough, he was also considering the sale of Vineland Research in St. Catharines, which is a venerable old research station that has huge plantings of tree fruits that have been there for many years, have created untold opportunities for the tender fruit growers, the peach, pear, apple and fruit growers in the Niagara Peninsula. They have innovated with new varieties and new production methods, innovated with different pruning methods, innovated with almost every facet of fruit production at that research station. To even consider the sale of such an institution is certainly wrong-headed. The Simcoe research station was another one that was being sold.

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I was going to talk about the reduction of jobs in the Guelph and Kitchener areas: ABB, Guelph; Sleeman, Guelph; Imperial Tobacco; W.C. Wood—"Sanitation for the Nation"—closed, 200 jobs gone.

Certainly Guelph needs some help. I don't think this resolution is the direction to go. I think we need to create jobs in that area and those jobs will attract people, as opposed to putting people into an area that is shrinking.

I know Mr. O'Toole would like to weigh in on this subject as well. I look forward to his comments.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I'm delighted to stand and speak to a private member's bill from the member from Guelph-Wellington, but I must state that when I first looked at the motion, I was a little

puzzled. I was puzzled, not so much because I believe she wants to do what she believes is best for her community, as all members do, and not so much that she is fighting for Guelph and its environs, as she was elected to do, but I am puzzled about why it was necessary for her to do this in the first place. If you read the resolution, it is to ask the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration to designate the city of Guelph as one of Ontario's immigrant gateway cities.

It would seem to me that that is the purview and prerogative of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and that she should simply have been able, at some point, to go over and say, "Mr. Colle, my colleague, don't you think Guelph should be included?" I would have thought that was the way things normally transpire within the governing party, but obviously that is not the case, because for some reason Minister Colle and his ministry have not seen fit to acknowledge the very good request that comes from the member from Guelph-Wellington. I guess that's why she's here. She is here to put some pressure on her own government colleagues, who have not seen fit, in the past or up until today, to do what would be right by the citizens and the city of Guelph.

Dealing with the topic itself, this is an issue that involves immigration, involves trying to convince people that Guelph is a place, when they first come to Canada, to settle in, to build their lives, their families in. Guelph is a wonderful little community. I don't get there as often as I should, but every time I get there I am transfixed by the beauty of its surroundings, by the churches, by the wonderful gardens and houses and the university. It is a beautiful place and it is to be commended. I would not be surprised that people would want to go and live there, not only for its wonderful settings but for the bucolic nature around Guelph.

But that is not usually what causes immigrants to settle in an area. As many members would know, I worked in the immigration department for some 20 years before being a politician. In those 20 years, I met immigrants from all over the world who were seeking to make Canada their home, some who came legally and some who came illegally, but they always had the same goal in mind. The goal was not to live in bucolic surroundings. The goal was to make money. The goal was to find a job. The goal was to fit in and acculturate themselves. The goal was that.

Immigrants, when they came to our country at one point in our history, had to sign a pledge form, in some cases, to go and work on the railroad, in other cases to work on farms, in some cases to work outside the cities for a period of three to five years. It happened within my lifetime that that was a requirement of immigrants to Canada, that they had to do that.

That is no longer the case. If you look at the Constitution of Canada, it quite clearly says there is mobility of all Canadian citizens and any resident of Canada as well. Not just Canadian citizens but any resident of Canada has freedom of mobility. Invariably, what happens is that although immigrants may come destined for one location,

they will move. If you invite them to go to Guelph, they will go to Guelph and they will stay in Guelph only so long as their needs are being met. The day that those needs are not met, they are—the same as any other citizen, the same as any other resident—entitled and free to move to where those needs might be met.

The needs are many. The needs can be schools, they can be jobs, they can be communities of interest, they can be people wanting to live with people who speak their own language or understand their own culture. All of those things are important to new immigrants. That is why you see, in a place like Toronto, immigrant communities, little clusters, even within a large city, places that we lovingly refer to as Chinatown or little India or Greek town or little Italy or Kensington, which is probably the best example of cultures living side by side.

It is important not so much to pass this resolution—and this resolution is intended, as I quote from it, “to attract investment and jobs.” It is the job losses in some parts of Ontario that are affecting immigration more than any other factor that you can think of. It is impossible: job losses related to the high costs of hydro, the northern policies of this and past governments, particularly in the industrial strategy in places like Guelph and in the 905, where 134,000 jobs are being lost. That is why immigrants are increasingly not choosing these communities. It's increasingly why, in a city like St. Catharines or in Welland or in Cornwall where the job losses have been enormous, where there just aren't jobs left to go around to the people living there, you're not going to see immigrants going there.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): Come on down to Cornwall and see what's going on.

Mr. Prue: And I'll see all the immigrants who are lined up at the station, too; really, if that's what you want to say. They are not likely to go there, because the jobs and the opportunities for themselves and for their children are simply not there.

If you want to know where immigrants are going in this day and age, they're not so much going to Ontario. Although they have come here for a century and continue to come here, they are increasingly, in increasing numbers, going to Alberta and to British Columbia, where the jobs and the opportunity are. That's what does it all.

I go back to the resolution of the member from Guelph–Wellington. Again, I commend her for making the resolution. If there is a vote called, I will vote for your resolution. But I want to say I don't know what it is going to accomplish; I don't know what the minister, in designating the five gateway cities in Ontario already, hopes to accomplish in those cities. Is it the intention of the government to pour money into those cities? Is it the intention of the government to give them financial capital to make television and radio slots to say, “Immigrants, please come and live in these cities, because we can provide for you and this is where the opportunities are”? I don't know, because I don't know whether that is the right strategy to begin with.

The right strategy is to ensure that all of Ontario is prosperous. The right strategy is to ensure that there are not job losses, that people, if they are looking for work, can find that work. The right strategy is to point out to immigrant groups and prospective immigrants where they are most likely to find alternatives if they are looking for alternatives, because in the end, they will, as the Vietnamese so readily showed to people who worked in immigration—the Vietnamese literally came to towns all over Ontario, all over Canada, but within two years they gravitated mostly to Toronto. Although there are still Vietnamese communities spread out across Ontario, the overwhelming majority that once settled in places like Guelph or in Ottawa ended up in Toronto.

I remember the mayor of Ottawa, Marion Dewar at the time, being asked about their Vietnamese immigrant program and why they were all in Toronto. She said, “God bless them; we did our best to get them here and now they've gone,” and she wished them well. That's the reality of what's going to happen. In the end, it's all about prosperity.

1050

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Perth–Middlesex.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Merry Christmas to you and your family and to all members. I am very pleased to join in the debate for my good friend the member from Guelph–Wellington and her resolution today. I would hazard a guess that the other members who represent Wellington county, for example, my friend the member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey and my friend the member from Waterloo–Wellington, will support today's resolution because I think they believe, like the member for Guelph–Wellington, that what is good for Guelph is good for Wellington.

I was surprised to hear my friend from Beaches–East York refer to the town or the city of Guelph—120,000 people—as a little community. I think you have to be from the Beach to think that 120,000 people is a little community. I can tell you, in southwestern Ontario, Guelph is a growing and large community by our standards. And I wouldn't refer to downtown Guelph as bucolic, but there are many parts of Wellington that are.

What I want to put on the record is that in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Research and Innovation, I learned a very interesting fact about the University of Guelph. The University of Guelph is the seventh-leading agricultural research university, not in Ontario, not in Canada, not in North America, but in the world. They are a global leader in the world.

This resolution deals with the issue of whether or not we want to make sure that that community and the surrounding community—Guelph is nestled in the heart of Wellington county—is a welcoming community, welcoming in Wellington and Guelph, to those people from around the world who want to do leading edge research in their own profession, particularly when it comes to agricultural research. The jobs of the 21st century will be

driven by our ability and our capacity to innovate and to take the ideas that are developed on the research tables in all of our research institutes and turn them into Ontario jobs.

The last time I was in Guelph I was pleased to join the member from Guelph–Wellington and the Premier at our very good news announcement about the tremendous reinvestment of the Linamar people, the family who own Linamar, into Guelph, because they really are leaders in auto parts, and that's a very strong driver in our economy.

Because of our automotive strategy, we are receiving those echo announcements. For example, in my own riding in Stratford we welcomed Aisin Canada, which will be supplying Toyota Canada in Woodstock. I know Hayashi is coming. I know that Futaba, FIO, is tripling. All of those things I think show us that Guelph is world-class and that we need to market Guelph and its surrounding communities and let the world know that they are indeed welcome to come to Guelph.

That's why I want to support the member, and I believe all members, not just those who represent Wellington but those who have aspirations as the Liberal candidate for Perth–Wellington to represent the good people of Wellington one day in the next Legislature.

I want to just take one moment to say congratulations to the mayor of Mapleton, John Green—John Green is the new warden of Wellington county; they're very proud of him in Mapleton—our new mayor, Dave Anderson, who has replaced David Burns as the mayor of Minto, and also to Mike Broomhead, who was actually acclaimed, along with his council, as the new council and again as the mayor of Wellington North. We want to praise them. They are a vital part of Wellington, and again, Guelph is nestled in the heart of Wellington county.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to support the private members' business by Ms. Sandals from Guelph–Wellington and the concept that I think each of us would advocate, that our communities are places to grow.

Yesterday, the Minister of Infrastructure Renewal introduced and claimed that the Places to Grow document, a guide to the growth plans, was an important and acclaimed document. But if you look at the document, you will find, as the member from Halton mentioned, that it's really all about creating the infrastructure for human growth. More importantly, it's about growing the economy so that there are opportunities for all people, whether they're immigrants or existing residents.

There's some uncertainty in the economy just now under McGuinty's plan. So the Places to Grow document makes it very clear, and I'll just read it: "Growth is important to Ontario's economy, but we need to be strategic about it. That's what the Places to Grow plan is all about—ensuring that we have places to grow business, places to grow food, places to grow families." So important here is making sure there are opportunities for people and for the economy in that local area to grow. I

would put on the table that Durham region is certainly one of those locations that people should look for.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): Like my colleagues before me, I want to take the opportunity to wish everyone in this Legislative Assembly and all my constituents back home the very best of the holiday, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah. It's a time for family to come together.

When someone as together as my colleague from Guelph–Wellington is, someone who is as committed to her constituents as she is, asks someone like myself to rise and say a few words, there's only one possible answer, and that is, "Of course. I'd be delighted to do that." I celebrate the member and her good work and her resolution here this morning. The member understands that she owes her constituents more than just her time and talent, but also her good judgment, her best judgment, which even on a bad day is good. So I want to celebrate that.

The resolution before us this morning is pretty simple. It's declaring that the member, who has often spoken about the brain drain, wants to acknowledge that there's a brain gain train a-comin', and she wants to make sure that Guelph is on the stop list, where people can come and invest their time, their talent, their energy and their resources in building a stronger community.

It's also, I sense, about asset management. You can't invite people to come to a community and to invest themselves in growing their families and developing that community unless and until you can find a way to properly work with the community to get them equipped for that as well. So it's not enough to say that Guelph is a wonderful community that wants to celebrate diversity and encourage diversity; you also have to advertise the fact that Guelph is a community that wants to embrace and celebrate diversity and all the advantages that come with that.

So in that sense, in the sense of asset management and beginning to get the community equipped, that is where I think the member is coming from. Developing the tools that are needed to help people to settle in and to make the kind of contribution that historically immigrants have made to this country is laudable and speaks very well for the member for Guelph–Wellington.

This is a morning to affirm the community of Guelph, its inclination to acknowledge the giftedness of immigrant populations and to embrace that community, as that community, through its wonderful member, embraces their talents. I look forward to supporting the resolution and applaud the member for Guelph–Wellington for having the foresight to bring it forward this morning.

The Deputy Speaker: Mrs. Sandals, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Sandals: I'd like to thank all my colleagues who have spoken to the motion this morning and to emphasize that while Guelph is the community that is named here, this is really about a whole lot of communities in Ontario that need to be actively recruiting immigrants because, as the member for London North Centre was so eloquent in

explaining, if communities don't attract immigrants, then communities will decline, and that is not good for the health of Ontario.

However, this does specifically name Guelph, and I think with good reason. As I mentioned earlier, Guelph, if you look at all the cities in Canada, has the 11th-highest proportion of immigrants. If you look at Ontario, Guelph has the sixth-highest proportion of immigrants of any city in Ontario. So we are well equipped to welcome new immigrants. In fact, a number of the bridge training programs are located in Guelph. As my colleague from Perth-Middlesex mentioned, Guelph is one of the leading research institutes in the area of agriculture in the world. As such, the bridge training programs for veterinarians, for agrologists, for virologists are all located in Guelph because we have particular expertise in those areas.

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The Guelph and District Multicultural Centre, aside from creating a wonderful annual multicultural festival at Guelph's Riverside Park, does the serious work of dealing with immigrant settlement in a whole lot of different cultures, as I've already mentioned. And we have increased support for those.

I would encourage my colleagues to support this motion to recognize that we do have to change the immigrant settlement patterns in Ontario in the future.

And I wish everyone happy holidays.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move second reading of Bill 178.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Tory has asked for unanimous consent to move second reading of Bill 178. I might just say, for those who are looking in wonderment, that it's because the bill has not been printed yet that that motion is required. So do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

TRUTH AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA VÉRITÉ ET LA TRANSPARENCE AU SEIN DU SYSTÈME JURIDIQUE

Mr. Tory moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 178, An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act with respect to truth and transparency in the justice system / Projet de loi 178, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires en ce qui a trait à la vérité et à la transparence au sein du système juridique.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Tory, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): It's my pleasure and my privilege for the first time to rise as a member of this Legislature to move second reading and in fact to have proposed on first reading a bill that I think is very important for the people of Ontario. I thought I would just try and spend my time addressing four things:

first of all, the problem; secondly, why does it matter; thirdly, why transparency will help; and fourthly, why good will come from this as opposed to any other kind of result.

The problem: I think the problem is illustrated by the fact that we've seen in many other instances in this House, in my short time here and I'm sure for years and years before that, that what happens oftentimes is that certain cases get a disproportionate amount of attention when it comes to what people think is going on in the justice system. The cases that either get attention here or in the media or both are the cases that are taken to summarize what's going on in a justice system that is very important to citizens across the province, which causes them to conclude that in some cases things are wrong when they are, and perhaps in other cases that things are wrong when they aren't, because these cases are the exception as opposed to the rule. But the bottom line is that what we don't have in order to help people to understand how things are functioning in the justice system are the facts on the table so people can know when there is a problem, in their view, and when there isn't.

I said the other day in questioning the Premier on this that it was ironic to me—at best, ironic—that we can count the number of eggs laid in the province each year, as is required under some statute or other, and there are people who do it in the government; the number is, as a matter of interest to the public watching, about 228 million. We can count the number of calls to the bear wise hotline that are referred to a live operator; I think the number there was 10,000. Yet we don't have basic information in hand to allow the Attorney General, when someone on this side of the House gets up and says that there's a terrible problem with people violating bail or whatever, to say, "Well, in fact, we've calculated the numbers, we keep track of it, and there isn't a problem. The incident you referred to is an isolated incident." And while that doesn't mean you won't take it seriously, you also won't conclude that there is a problem. But the facts just aren't available. I believe what that has led to as well as part of this problem is that there is a perceived lack of accountability. If you don't have the facts, if people don't know what's actually going on in the justice system, then no one really feels held to account, no one really feels they have to answer at all, whoever it might be, but starting with the government of the day, and the Legislature, quite frankly, which is the place where these laws are ultimately made.

I am one of those who believes that independence of the judiciary—which I respect; I learned about it when I was a law student; I understand it as a legislator and a citizen—just to speak to that particular thing, which I will come back to at the end in talking about good and not harm that will come from this, does not mean a complete lack of accountability. Everybody has to be accountable who serves in positions of public trust in our system. I understand the difference between being independent, but I don't think that means you have a

complete lack of accountability for what you do, even if it is just to the point, which is really what this bill speaks to, of keeping track of various decisions that are made by judges and others that are just facts of things that happen in the justice system day to day.

Why does this matter? It matters, first and foremost, because confidence in our system of justice is absolutely paramount to the overall strength of our democratic system. The courts don't operate in isolation all by themselves; they operate as part of a system that says, "We meet here, elected by our constituents to make laws." Those laws are then made and duly passed, and the laws are enforced and interpreted by the courts. The courts are independent, appointed by governments, but they are a key pillar of the democratic system.

If you want to look no further than the best example in recent times of why all of this matters and why what goes on in courts and what goes on in Legislatures and so on are all part of one whole as opposed to being separate parts, you look no further than Caledonia. Caledonia has been a situation, in my view, where what I think people see is the inconsistent application of laws between one group and another. They see a failure to uphold respect for the law and the rule of law. It has shaken people's confidence. I can tell you, from having been there as recently as a week ago and spent the night, that the most unfortunate part of all is the view that is held by many of the local residents there—you can call them right or call them wrong, but it is a view they hold honestly as a result of their experiences—that they have lost confidence in the police and in the system of justice that it is working for all people, at all times, in an equitable manner. We cannot have a situation where we have that confidence lost on the part of individual citizens across the province in their system of justice, because it is their system.

Why will transparency help? I believe transparency will help because, first and foremost, like we always say—it's an expression we hear used all the time: Justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done. So by having transparency and having the facts on the table—and again, these are just facts of things that either happen or they don't happen—and having people be able to see what is going on in the justice system in terms of things that are going on and are problems or are perceived problems or aren't, to come back to where I started, where things that often get a lot of heat and light in here are things that aren't problems at all; they're individual, isolated incidents. If you put those facts on the table, then you see justice working and how it's working, as opposed to just being able to be told, "It is working." People want to see the facts so they can judge for themselves, to some extent, whether they think the system is working or not. And the remedy then becomes not for them to rush down and picket the courthouse to make judges upset; they come and picket us, quite frankly, and say, "Look, if there's a problem here, as judged by the facts, then you people in the Legislature have some obligation to deal with that and to change the law, because we think the justice system isn't working."

If you ask me, "Will this raise questions about the justice system?", I hope so. What's wrong with that? Why are we afraid of looking at the facts of what goes on in our courts and having people be able to raise questions? That's part of the democratic process too. If you believe the courts are part of that overall accountability we all have as citizens and us as legislators and people who work in the justice system for upholding and strengthening those pillars of our democratic system, I say yes. And I say, frankly, the more that people are emboldened and informed to be able to ask good questions about things that may be real issues—what's wrong with that? We want that to happen because that will cause us to pass better laws and to strengthen the justice system and to increase confidence in the justice system.

I'm asking in the bill that these facts be collected on a broader basis. I have listened carefully to what the Attorney General has said and his quotes of the former Chief Justice, who's a very good friend of mine, a friend of long standing from when he was the Attorney General of this province, one whom the current Attorney General referred to as one of the great Attorneys General of Ontario, namely Chief Justice McMurtry. He expressed a perfectly legitimate concern about making sure that what you don't do is interfere with the independence of the judiciary. So what I've provided for in the bill, by and large, is the aggregate collection of these facts across the court system as a whole, so you're not saying, "We're going to go to that particular judge or that particular courtroom and really bore down and analyze what that person is doing or whatever"; you are simply going to look at what's going on across the system and try and assess whether that indicates that there is anything that really supports concerns that people articulate from time to time, including me, or doesn't support those concerns, that it really isn't a problem; it's more of an isolated incident. So I think that's why transparency will help.

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The last point I want to make in the time available is why good will come from this, and not harm. Perhaps it bears repeating what I just said: By providing for the collection of this data in the aggregate across all courts in the justice system in Ontario on things like bail violations and sentencing deals and plea bargains and so on, you are not running the risk of putting pressure on individual judges, in my view, as to how they decided or what their ratio was or anything else. You are simply looking at the system as a whole and you're able to make some judgments and form some opinions and ask some questions based on the system as a whole.

Secondly, there are a couple of instances, I will say, where we've provided for specific collection of information by court location. That is on, for example, things like adjournments. If you ask me whether we'd better get a handle on what is going on with adjournments in the court system that is causing the time it's taking to get people to trial on criminal and civil matters, and find out why those adjournments are going on and if there's a

place where they're granting twice as many as somewhere else and therefore the waiting time is twice as long, we probably should be looking court by court and finding out why that would be, that some court location or other would grant twice as many adjournments for twice as long as somewhere else. I don't think, again, that interferes at all with the independence of the judiciary.

I look at this, and in the end it is about where I started. That is that the reason I think this is good is because it does not interfere in any way with the independence of the judiciary, which is the only argument that has been raised against it. The only other one I've heard mentioned is the question of cost. I say look, if we can afford to count the number of eggs, if we can afford to count the number of calls to the bear wise hotline that go to a live operator, we should be able to count the number of bail violations and sentencing deals and plea bargains that go on, because that is fundamental to the main reason I brought this forward, which is that I am determined to try to make whatever difference I can as Leader of the Opposition, as a member of the Legislature, and I hope one day as Premier, to increase confidence in the justice system, because it is such a vital part of a strong, vibrant democracy.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I am delighted to join in this debate. From what I can understand, the Leader of the Opposition is asking here, in terms of truth and transparency in the justice system, whether judges grant bail and which judge is denying bail.

Now, I kind of think there is somewhat of a connection between what the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting here and what was proposed in 2001 by the Progressive Conservative Party. I remember the bill that was introduced by Marilyn Mushinski, since the leader has quoted the chief justice of Ontario and what he has said about that particular bill. The question, of course, is, is there a connection between the bill that the Leader of the Opposition is proposing and the bill that Marilyn Mushinski wanted to pass into law. There is an interesting distinction, but there is certainly also an interesting connection. Judge McMurtry had said in 2001 about Marilyn Mushinski's bill, "All I can do is express the hope that that was not the intention despite the perception that the members of the Legislature would have the good sense not to proceed with such legislation." Even Mr. Flaherty, who was here not too long ago, acknowledged that the legislation would not go any further because of concerns that it would interfere with the judicial independence of the judiciary.

So we have to be treading here on very careful grounds. I know the leader had indicated that the judiciary must be independent, and it cannot even be seen that there is political interference in the independence of the judiciary. That's what he says. I do not wish to belabour the point, and quote what Mr. Runciman had indicated earlier, from what we have here, his indication that he wants to track the records of individual judges.

That's different maybe from what the leader wants. I'm not quite clear sure whether—

Interjection.

Mr. Ruprecht: Since the two of you are sitting very close to each other, you would probably know the difference here.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Tony, that's not what it says.

Mr. Ruprecht: I know. But the point is—and you must accept this—it is fair political comment. Would you not say that? It's fair political comment to indicate that, and that's what the Chief Justice wants to indicate here as well.

There are some other comments that I wish to make. We cannot accept the statement at all that Liberals are weak in terms of crime. I have a whole host of indications of how Liberals are strong against crime, whether it's an indication of proposing that we hire 1,000 police officers, whether it is a political impact statement. In fact, the member for Parkdale-High Park is here today, and I wanted to indicate that, over 16 years ago already: Parkdale "Keep Crime Out," impact statements. We have done—

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Ruprecht, please put that down.

Mr. Ruprecht: It's just an indication, Mr. Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: Please put it down. Thank you.

Mr. Ruprecht: Community witness is a great program. It's a program that establishes a link between the police and the courts, who testify on the impact of crime on our neighbourhoods; a great program. I have about 15 other programs to discuss here, but unfortunately, I'm out of time because my colleague needs the time to wrap up.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 178 and to say right off the top that I certainly don't have any problem with this bill. It's calling for transparency. The hope is, with transparency, if you know the facts, that this leads to accountability and then, hopefully, at the end of the chain, to action. I don't hold out a lot of hope. As we've seen with the Auditor General's reports, what is necessarily transparent doesn't, just by the nature of its being, lead to accountability, and it certainly doesn't necessarily end in action, certainly not with the McGuinty Liberals.

I also want to set the bill in a little bit of context, and that is that we do live in a pretty safe situation. I don't think anyone here would say that right now we're involved in a crime wave of any sort. There was an opinion piece in the Toronto Star on August 16 that pointed this out. This was by the writer James Morton, who says:

"Whenever people read or hear attacks on Canada's justice system, they should bear in mind that our judges cannot respond when attacked about why they applied the law as they did. Crown prosecutors face similar constraints. Even defence counsel are limited in what they can say to the media."

So that's the caveat, of course, around this bill: that this should, in no way, shape, or form—and you've heard

others say this—be an attempt to bridge that independence of any sort.

Just generally, what is it like to be an Ontarian right now in terms of law and order and crime?

“Break-ins and car thefts: 7% lower than the year before. Counterfeiting, previously a growth area: down 20%. Youth crime: down 6%. Property crime by youth: down 12%.

“The homicide rate did rise by 4%, but after years of steady decline. It’s still down 30% compared with the mid-1970s.”

Canadians understand all that. In light of the context for Bill 178, we can say that a survey showed that crime and justice ranked far down the list of our worries: well below education, the economy, the environment, international issues and certainly well below health care. So law-and-order issues are not front and centre among our constituents’ concerns.

This writer goes on to say that, by and large, “Canada’s judges, crowns and defence lawyers apply the law, as written, as fully and fairly as possible.

“Our judges are famous for their balance and common sense.

“Our crowns exercise great care to see justice done,” and

“Canadian defence lawyers act vigorously to protect the accused.” He concludes, “This adds up to a pretty good system” and says it could be improved.

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Certainly, that’s where I would like to start with my comments, because I think we share a desire in this House to see our justice system improved. As New Democrats, one of our concerns with our justice system and the way that our justice system works is that we really have two justice systems: We have one for those with money, and we have another justice system entirely for those who don’t have money.

I drove around with 14 division. It was a pleasure to do so, an honour, and it gave me a very good first-hand experience of what law and order looks like on the ground in my riding of Parkdale–High Park. I can tell you that one of the most chilling sights I have ever laid eyes on was the computer in the police car as we were driving around. Those incidents that required a red flashing light, the serious ones where they really needed an officer on the scene, light up first, and then there are a whole series of others that were lit up with yellow that aren’t quite as pressing. Among those that were pressing that lit up while I was driving around with this particular officer were things like break and enters in progress, assaults in progress—those lit up. There were about 10 of them. He said to me, “You know, we have 20 cars on the road tonight, with 100,000 people.” He said, “There is no way we’ll even get to those 10 high-profile, high-needs incidents—no way that we’ll get to some of them until tomorrow morning.”

The McGuinty government has said that they have put 1,000 new officers—or will be, because they’re not all in place yet—on the streets of our cities and our com-

munities. But the reality is that we need a whole lot more than that to really keep up community policing. The reality is that we have a lot less police on our streets than we did when I grew up in the city of Toronto because our population has grown far, far faster than the number of police put out there.

Bill 178 talks to the transparency of the legal and justice system. Here’s the reality on the ground of the justice system, where the police try to enforce those laws: We don’t have enough police to enforce the laws we have already. So once we find out what’s going wrong, what are we going to do about it unless we have an enforcement piece in place? So we need more community police.

Then I look at Bill 178, and I see that on the very first page one of the things that Mr. Tory is asking for is information about, “the average, median and 90th percentile wait times in criminal and civil proceedings in which there is a trial, indicating, “the time from the commencement,” and so he goes.

It’s the poor people, of course, who suffer from the lack of police the most. Also, it’s the poor people who suffer from the lack of transparency and the lack of efficiency in the justice system the most. Again, I quote from the paper article—this is October 14 in the *Globe and Mail*—that summarizes about legal aid. And remember, for the poor amongst us, legal aid is their only hope at getting justice. This writer goes on to conclude: “In its recently completed 2006-07 business plan, Legal Aid Ontario warned that funding has ‘reached the point where it is no longer adequate to meet existing service requirements.’

“It said that it ‘is turning away more people than ever before—the number of people refused service has increased by 42% in less than two years.’” So if you are poor and trying to get justice in the province of Ontario, you’ve got to stand in line. And then, most of the time, this seems to indicate you’re not going to have any luck even getting a lawyer so you can defend yourself, or, for that matter, look after your own vital interests.

We all have in our constituency offices cases like the one that I’m going to just suggest—and this a closed case now—a case of property theft. This was a woman who literally ran out of money hiring lawyers and then was forced to go to legal aid, but didn’t qualify for legal aid. Then what is she to do? She was then forced to defend herself, and we know where that usually gets you. So in terms of those without money, this justice system—so-called justice system—isn’t working very well.

Again, I’m going to quote from a Toronto Star article about the legal aid system. “‘In his days, Ontario’s legal aid plan was the best in the world,’ Bayne said, adding McGuinty ‘cares about people’ and knows, like education and health care, a ‘quality’ legal aid plan ‘goes to the heart of a just civil society.’”

He goes on: “But in the mid-1990s the province capped legal aid funding and tightened eligibility rules, which remain unchanged, even though the cost of living

has gone up. The result: fewer people qualify for legal aid.

"A decade ago, a single person with a net income of \$18,000 a year would have automatically qualified for a legal aid certificate. Today, someone earning between \$13,000 and \$16,000 after taxes falls into a grey area. Legal aid officials look at that person's income and living expenses before deciding whether to issue a legal aid certificate."

Someone earning between \$13,000 and \$16,000 a year—a grey area. You can imagine how many people in Ontario don't qualify for legal aid and still don't have enough money to hire a lawyer by any other means. What happens to them? Where do they, and how do they, get justice?

Again, the Star, on November 24, concludes and says: "True, the Liberal government has increased base funding for legal aid since it came into office in 2003. But total funding, which comes from both Queen's Park and Ottawa, has fallen short of keeping up with growing demand and costs over the past decade."

"In fact, after adjusting for inflation, combined federal and provincial funding for Legal Aid Ontario is still well below 1995 levels...."

"Yet access to adequate legal counsel for the province's poorest citizens is routinely undermined by tight eligibility rules that have been static for years...." It goes on to talk about the same thing, someone "earning as little as \$13,000 a year after taxes may be too rich for legal aid."

What does this mean for justice for those in our midst? I want to draw this House's attention to a very high profile case, the case of Rose McGroarty. Rose McGroarty was known to people in Parkdale–High Park. She was a cook at Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre. She was well loved and well liked in that community. She was a victim, a very high profile one, of domestic violence and eventually domestic homicide.

Domestic homicide, as many people who are in the justice system know, is still a growing and going concern. She was not only killed, she was also mutilated. Her body was cut up and some of her body parts were left just across from the house on Elm Grove that my husband and I are in the process of purchasing, and some in North York. It took a while, but finally they arrested her partner. Finally they prosecuted him. A whole community was in mourning. We were horrified at this barbaric act, this outrageous crime.

Rose was a victim of domestic abuse, as it came to light, for many years, as are many women. This is a crime that we need to do something about. And in light of December 6 and the Montreal massacre, this is a crime that we should all feel deeply about and want to see some action over.

I look at the Hadley commission. I look at the percentage around domestic violence and domestic abuse—again, setting the context, my drive around with 14th division, how few police we have on the ground, how little they can respond.

We know that restraining orders don't mean anything for most women who are victimized. We know that if you're victimized as a woman at home and you're at high risk of being murdered, there is very little help out there. Shelters are full. There aren't enough of them. There's no housing. There's no chance that you can go from your house, where abuse is happening and where murder might happen, to a safe place after shelter. Chances are, as a victim of abuse, you can't afford the housing that you need, because there isn't any. There are 65,000 families waiting for housing in the Toronto area. So chances are, after you get rejected by the shelter—even if you get lucky and get into the shelter, if you want to get out of the shelter and go somewhere else, into your own home, you won't find that home.

Chances are if you're on Ontario Works or ODSP, if you're on one of those systems, which many victims of abuse are because they have to leave jobs for their protection, you won't be able to afford to find living accommodation. You'll be forced back into that system that puts you at incredible risk. So this is the context into which Bill 178 is brought, a system of justice that is really one set of laws for the wealthy and another set of laws in practice for the poor.

1130

I would suggest that what we need is not only transparency, which is what this bill speaks to, hopefully followed by accountability, but what we really need from the McGuinty Liberals is action. We need action on the justice system so that you don't have to be wealthy to avail yourself of it, but if you are poor, if you are being abused, if you might be murdered because you are in a high-risk group, that is, women who are abused, you can actually find some justice.

I speak on behalf of all of those victims out there who are being abused right now and who can't find justice under the current system. They can't find housing, they can't find a shelter place. We know that abuse goes up this time of year. It does not go down this time of year, it goes up. I see in my community those families using food banks. I see those families at risk. I know what it's like to not be heard. I've stood with them in courts, watching the abuser get off yet again. That's not the answer. The answer for them is a systematic plan of action, a systematic plan for housing, for income support, so they can get legal aid, so they can get a lawyer and the lawyer can represent them.

Again, transparency—a good thing only if followed by accountability and then only if followed by action.

On behalf of everyone who has tried to get legal aid and can't, who has tried to make the justice system work for them and can't, who has tried to phone a police officer and there isn't one available, I say let's make our justice system work. Let's not only see what's happening, let's actually get something happening.

Just to close, I want to wish all of those who are watching from Parkdale–High Park and everyone else a very happy holiday and, I hope, one free from the need to use this justice system, because it ain't working well.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? Does any other member wish to speak?

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): I'm pleased to join this debate on Bill 178, the Truth and Transparency in the Justice System Act, 2006. I commend our leader, John Tory, for bringing forward this private member's bill to deal with what, in my view, is also a very important issue.

This bill would amend section 79.3 of the Courts of Justice Act to provide that the annual report of the Attorney General on the administration of the courts must include specific information, such as the number of charges for offences involving the use of firearms or violence, wait times for trial in criminal and civil proceedings, bail violations, adjournments ordered on matters under the Criminal Code and the Provincial Offences Act and credits awarded for time spent in custody before conviction.

Statistics Canada has reported that there were over 100,000 bail violations in 2004. In making an announcement in Toronto on November 23, 2006, concerning his government's intention to bring forward amendments to the Criminal Code to provide a reverse onus in bail hearings involving firearms, Prime Minister Harper noted that, "In this city, police report that almost 1,000 crimes involving firearms or restricted weapons have been committed so far this year. Nearly 40% of them were committed by someone who was on bail, parole, temporary absence or probation. Gun crime is a menace to public safety, and protecting Canadians must be the first priority of our bail system."

Premier McGuinty attended the Prime Minister's announcement and expressed his support for these amendments, stating, "Ontarians want to see action ... across party lines. I want to urge all the federal parties to continue working together to ensure this law gets speedy passage." Yet, despite this professed support, this government has steadfastly refused to track justice statistics that would be immensely helpful in identifying problems and trends that might prevent serious injury and, in some cases, even death to innocent victims.

Taking matters back a little bit, on August 24, 2006, the Attorney General endorsed the finding of a panel of justice and media experts that cameras be allowed in Ontario courts. He commented, "I think that our justice system is ready for its close-up," yet only three days before, on August 21, 2006, in clause-by-clause review of Bill 14, the so-called Access to Justice Act, the Liberal members on the committee unanimously rejected several amendments that were put forward by our party that would require tracking of justice statistics, such as offences committed while on bail, gun offences dropped through plea bargaining, bail violations and court cancellations and remands.

Similarly, in an opposition day motion which was brought before this Legislature on November 28 this year, Mr. Tory proposed that inasmuch as the public was becoming increasingly concerned about the number of crimes alleged to have been committed by people who were on bail, the government should: (1) adopt a policy

to direct crown attorneys to oppose the making of all orders for bail for violent crimes; (2) seek a review of all orders granting bail for charges involving crimes; and (3) begin providing more detailed information about the justice system, in order to inform the public about whether it is functioning well and in the best interests of public safety. In order to do that, statistics would be required to be maintained along the lines as those proposed by Bill 178. Again, this motion was defeated in this Legislature without a single Liberal member supporting it.

We in the PC Party are of the view that this is a significant issue in the public interest, and that is why we keep bringing it before this Legislature. All of us are hearing—I think every member of this House is probably hearing from the constituents who want to know why it is that among 32 people facing murder or manslaughter charges in Toronto this year, 14 of them were out on bail at the time of the offence. Now, the standard response we've been hearing from the Attorney General and the Minister of Community Safety is that any kind of record keeping or compilation of statistics regarding such justice matters would constitute interference with the judiciary.

We in the PC Party don't share that view. We know about and are extremely respectful of a need for judicial independence, but it's our position and our view that the keeping of mere statistics does not constitute any kind of judicial interference whatsoever, and that it really is vitally necessary and in the public interest that these statistics be maintained, so that people will know how the justice system is functioning. After all, as Mr. Tory has indicated, if we keep statistics on the poultry production and number of eggs produced in Ontario in a year, and we are maintaining more serious statistics such as the length of wait time for medical procedures, it indicates that statistics are kept routinely across all of the ministries. Why should the justice system's statistics be any different? They are statistics like any other, and the public has the right to know. But even more than that, it's critical that the public maintain their confidence in the justice system.

Yet it continues to be a bit of a mystery to the average person. Time and time again, I hear that from my constituents in Whitby–Ajax, and I'm sure many members hear that from their constituents as well: "What goes on in that system? Why don't we know about it?" And when they hear some of the tragic stories about crimes committed by people while out on bail, sometimes with tragic endings such as people being killed, they wonder how this could happen.

But when you look at the basic issues involving bail and you start with the question of the presumption of innocence pending trial, then you look at the situation involving bail and look at the very narrow situations, really, in which bail can be denied: The first one is to ensure that the accused does not flee from justice—that's an obvious one; to protect the public if there is a substantial likelihood that the accused will re-offend, a secondary ground; and to maintain confidence in the administration of justice, and that's equally as important.

The public has a right to know how their justice system is functioning with respect to the granting of bail and the other types of statistics that would be maintained by Bill 178.

Bill 178 will remove some of the mystery that people feel surrounds the court system and the judicial system, and will require the disclosure of certain information, thereby introducing a transparency into the system that we've all heard people want to see.

On this basis, I would commend Mr. Tory again for bringing this bill forward, and I would urge all members of this Legislature to support it.

1140

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to indicate my support for the bill and the Leader of the Official Opposition, John Tory, and commend him for introducing this legislation. I think it's a strong indication to the people of Ontario of what a John Tory government would look like, in terms of dealing with so many challenges in the justice system in the province of Ontario. Transparency and truth in the justice system would be things that I think virtually every Ontarian would welcome.

I could speak on this issue for hours. There is a certain degree of crisis in the justice system in Ontario. We've seen that with the Auditor General's report last September, with the backlog of cases. We've seen it recently in a letter that both Mr. Tory and I received from the mayor of Mississauga with the challenges that the provincial offences court has, the lack of justices of the peace and the impact that's going to have on Peel region and Mississauga specifically. I'll get into that a little later.

One of the things that we always hear in this House when any of us on the opposition benches raises issues with respect to the operation of the courts or concerns surrounding the justice system—we get tossed back at us that somehow, by raising these issues and shining a light on some of the problems and challenges, we are jeopardizing this mysterious thing called “judicial independence.” The great unwashed, also known as hard-working taxpayers, who pay the salaries of judges, who pay the salaries of lawyers who are accessing the legal aid system in Ontario, apparently, under this interpretation, have no right to know what's happening inside what some would describe as an elite circle, this sort of incestuous little clique. I have to say that John Tory and the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario disagree, and strongly disagree.

I'd asked the question, why shouldn't taxpayers know? Why shouldn't they know the number of crimes committed while folks are on bail, or on probation or conditional release, while subject to a criminal deportation order? Why shouldn't we know that? Why shouldn't we know the number of remands per case by court location and categorized by Criminal Code or provincial offences, pre or post trial date being set? Adjournment: whether it was requested by the crown, the defence or the court? The Liberal government says no. Having taxpayers know

where the problems are and who's causing them is somehow a threat to the independence of the judiciary.

A couple of weeks ago, you will recall Ontario appeal court Judge Michael Moldaver—I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly—spoke out about the mess that is Ontario's justice system. It was very refreshing to hear someone of his rank talking about these challenges. His perspective was essentially—some would interpret it as an assault on the defence bar, but he also acknowledged in his comments that his fellow judges are part of the problem. With respect to that, he was referencing that, in his view, they do not put a quick enough end to what he describes as frivolous motions and fishing expeditions by defence lawyers.

Predictably, the defence bar has reacted with indignation: “We're not the problem; it's somebody else.” There was an interesting article in today's Toronto Star, co-drafted by the executive, I think the president and vice-president, of the Criminal Lawyers' Association; I recall Alan Gold's name being mentioned. There was a very interesting quote in that. I'm going to quote directly from that article: “There are no reliable statistics available to connect defence lawyers to the systemic problems that plague the system.” That's the defence bar's response to Judge Moldaver's concerns about the mess in the justice system. They're saying, “There are no statistics to prove this. We're not the problem because you don't have any statistics to back up that allegation.” So round and round we go.

Clearly, we need those statistics. The defence bar is saying it, at least, in response to an assault from an appeal court judge. But when we get into discussing it in this place, even the defence bar, or many of them, may be onside in saying, “No, we can't have this kind of annual reporting so that people who draft the laws and the people who pay the bills should have a right to know what's going on in the system and where the problems are.”

Before I get into this whole issue of judicial independence, I want to talk about the problems in the courts just briefly. Our leader, Mr. Tory, talked about it. There are so many implications to this. If you look at the victims of crime, they are on many occasions revictimized by the failure of our courts to deal in an adequate and timely manner with their challenges. Police overtime is an enormous cost burden: police going to the courts, waiting around, and there's another remand, another adjournment. That is so frequent. Talk to any police service in this province. It is a real, significant problem, not only in a cost sense, but you're taking front-line officers off the front line, sitting around in courtrooms hour after hour, day after day, week after week. That's a very, very serious problem.

I want to briefly talk about judicial independence. The speaker said we can't have some form of accountability, that this is jeopardizing judicial independence. I get worked up and irritated by this argument all the time. It's exercised all the time, and I have great problems. The

judiciary has to show a commitment to greater efficiencies in the system dealing with costs, but frequently it's not the case. When I was corrections minister, we had judges saying, "No, we can't have any connection between remand, jails and the courts." We can't even have a tunnel, because somehow that jeopardizes judicial independence. Try and figure that one out. We've had judges arbitrarily saying, "I have to have six armed police officers in my court," at \$70,000 a year, "to provide security." Talk to the chief in Owen Sound about the cost burden that's placing on municipalities.

There has to be some kind of oversight applied, some kind of accountability. What we're talking about here I think is very, very reasonable. The judges have independence. They have essentially lifetime appointments. They're guaranteed a job until the age of 75. Try to remove a judge, try to fire an incompetent judge, a judge who has misstepped. It's a very, very difficult process.

Knowing what they are doing in their courts, keeping track of what's happening, is in no way, shape or form jeopardizing judicial independence.

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I'm pleased to speak to this. This is a rehash of the old Judicial Accountability Act that was a Tory private member's bill in 2001. That was entitled the Judicial Accountability Act, and that was a much milder title than the bill we have before us today. The bill we have before us today has the rather ominous title of An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act with respect to truth and transparency, the implication being that the crown attorneys and the judges in our system are untruthful, that they're not transparent. This bill goes much further than the 2001 Judicial Accountability Act.

What did distinguished chief justices and distinguished previous Attorneys General say about that bill, with the even less ominous title than the one we're dealing with today? Here's what Justice McMurtry said on January 10, 2001, when this bill was introduced: "The people of this province are best served by an independent and impartial judiciary that seeks to find a just result." There was a story in the Ottawa Citizen in January 2001 that went on to report on Justice McMurtry's comments. It said, "Judge McMurtry challenged the (Tory) government's decision to allow a private member's bill calling for the tracking of individual judges' sentencing records to proceed through the legislative process." He described it as "a rather heavy-handed and irresponsible attempt to intimidate judges in the sentencing process."

1150

The Attorney General of the day, Mr. Flaherty, acknowledged, according to this story, that having considered Justice McMurtry's comments and gone into the matter, he would "not go any further" because of concerns that it would interfere with judicial independence. Now, the Leader of the Opposition says, "This is not about interfering with judicial independence. I'm talking about aggregate statistics. I'm trying to get a general overview of what is going on in the province. We don't

want to zero in on anybody's particular record." But words have meaning, and sometimes it's a good idea just to read and absorb the clear meaning of the words. Let me refer to subclause 1(2)(h)(iii) of this act with respect to truth and transparency in the judicial system. First of all, it's not aggregate statistics or a general overview of the province; they're talking about statistics from, (i), the individual court location. Okay.

Now here is where the language becomes clear and is evident of the real intent to get into and to develop particular records of particular crown attorneys and particular judges. It's talking about tracking adjournment statistics.

"1(2)(h)(iii) whether the adjournment was requested by the crown or by the defence"—those are individuals, but here, I think, is where it gives the real intent of what this legislation is trying to get into—"or whether it was ordered on the judge's own initiative." How particular does that get? That is not a general overview. That not an aggregate look at what's going on. That's looking at an individual judge's own personal initiative and how he has disposed of a particular aspect of a case. That, by anybody's definition, by any clear reading of those words, is an interference with the independence of the judicial system.

Now, I'd like to quote a former lawyer colleague, a distinguished member of this Legislature on the Tory side and one of my predecessors in the riding of Willowdale, Charles Harnick, the Attorney General of the day. Here is what Charles Harnick said—and I have great respect for former Attorney General Harnick, as I do for Chief Justice McMurtry, a former distinguished Conservative Attorney General. Charles Harnick, quoted in an article in the Globe and Mail by Colin Freeze, and I'm quoting from the article: "Former Progressive Conservative Cabinet Minister Charles Harnick told a group of young lawyers yesterday that the Judicial Accountability Act would be bad law—and that he was 'proud to say I made it clear quickly what my position was,' when he quashed similar legislation" with the same intent several years before that.

The article goes on to quote then Attorney General Harnick saying that "judges have to make decisions based on the cases before them, not based on public pressure." Let me just address this public pressure, because I want to refer to something that came up in the opposition comments a couple of minutes ago. There was a reference to, "The taxpayers pay judges' salaries. Taxpayers want to know the problems and who's causing them," the "who" being the individual judges. That's the flaw in this private member's bill. It is going to put a chill into how judges do their work, how individual crown attorneys do their work, how individual civilian court administrators administer the process of scheduling cases. Can you imagine judges, crown attorneys, court administrators doing their work and they've got this ominous act hanging over their shoulders? An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act with respect to truth—with respect

to truth—the implication being that somehow, I suppose, they're telling lies, they're dishonest. Couple the title of that act with comments from the opposition Tory party in this Legislature today who are talking about, "If the taxpayers are paying the judges' salary, they're entitled to know who's doing what, who's deciding what."

Our common law system has been well served over the centuries by the system that we have; that is, we have an independent Legislature elected by the voters, we have an executive drawn from that Legislature, and we have an independent judiciary. They work in tandem: The judicial system is not any more independent or more superior than any of the other two elements of our governing system.

When we start to tamper with the system and say that we as legislators who are elected for a term—maybe two terms, maybe three terms; governments change. The Liberals are forming the government today; in years to come it may be one of the other opposition parties. When the political party of the day has an idea about how judges, crown attorneys, court administrators should be going about doing their work—what they should be emphasizing, what they should not be emphasizing, where they should come down hard, where they should come down a little easier—when that judicial system starts shifting following the election of the day, so that one day we might have a Liberal view of what judges should be doing and a few years later a Conservative view of what judges should be doing or an NDP view of what judges should be doing, that is, in the final analysis, politicizing the judicial system.

For centuries, democracies have depended upon, as a last refuge in many cases, an independent judicial system. An individual member of this Legislature, a citizen from the streets, someone in incarceration, a police officer who finds himself in trouble or the person who the police officer has arrested can go to that independent judicial system and have their case determined independently, without having the judges and crown attorneys looking over their shoulders with respect to being governed by something—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Mr. Tory, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Tory: I appreciate the fact that other members have participated in the debate today. What this is about is the public's right to know facts, things that actually happen in the justice system. That's about all it's about. It's about increasing transparency, which we hear a lot about from the people across the way on many other matters, with regard to what goes on in the courts. It's about building confidence in the justice system or, I might even say, rebuilding confidence in the justice system. It is about indicating where there might be problems but, frankly, eliminating a lot of other places where there aren't problems and where the facts will show that a lot of things we end up discussing in here and in the media and elsewhere really aren't problems.

What this bill is not about is individual judges, except on the matter of remands and adjournments, which have to do with the functioning of the courts. But on all the other ones that have to do with the exercise of their discretion on plea bargains, bail violations and so on, it is simply about aggregate collection of data from across the province and the reporting on that data from across the province. It's rubbish to suggest it's about somebody not being truthful. There was no suggestion of that at all, and for people to suggest that is a smokescreen.

If there's a chill coming from anywhere, it is a chill that is coming from the fact that people are losing confidence in the justice system as they see the plea bargain deals, the sentencing deals, the bail violations, the disrespect for the law, and the fact that there are things that get written up in the press in great detail or discussed in the Legislature that breed disrespect for those laws. So I say, if the Attorney General of this province has time to go down and look at a Christmas tree in a courthouse when he should have just issued a joint statement with the Chief Justice saying, "Get over this orgy of political correctness. Let's let people celebrate all the holidays," if he's got time to do that, if this government has time to count how many eggs are laid in Ontario—and probably hatched too, for that matter—then they should get on with letting the sun shine in on these facts and letting people know what's going on in the justice system to build confidence in that system.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

CITY OF GUELPH

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 69, standing in the name of Mrs. Sandals.

Mrs. Sandals has moved private member's notice of motion number 42. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

TRUTH AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA VÉRITÉ ET LA TRANSPARENCE AU SEIN DU SYSTÈME JURIDIQUE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 70, standing in the name of Mr. Tory.

Mr. Tory has moved second reading of Bill 178. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

The Deputy Speaker: All members in favour, please stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Elliott, Christine
Hardeman, Ernie
Hudak, Tim
Klees, Frank

MacLeod, Lisa
Miller, Norm
O'Toole, John
Patten, Richard
Runciman, Robert W.
Ruprecht, Tony

Scott, Laurie
Tory, John
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte

Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Matthews, Deborah
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Mossop, Jennifer F.
Qaadri, Shafiq

Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Smith, Monique
Van Bommel, Maria
Wilkinson, John
Zimmer, David

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 17; the nays are 26.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1208 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I rise today on behalf of the children and families of my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock. After promising with much fanfare an initial investment for Best Start child care spaces, the Minister of Children and Youth Services decided to remove them despite other similar regions in the same circumstances not being affected. As a result of a personal vendetta, which the minister refuses to put aside, Kawartha-Victoria is not receiving one single Best Start space.

Let's not forget about the \$59,000 luxury vehicles, the trips to the Caribbean, Argentina and other exotic locations, and the \$2,000 gym memberships that she has made hard-working Ontario families pay for. While this is occurring, she has personally decided that out of nearly 15,000 Best Start spaces, Kawartha-Victoria will get zero.

Personal vendettas and political motivations are the priority of the minister and the McGuinty Liberals. They're willing to say anything and do anything, even if it means punishing innocent families and their children.

If she is really genuinely concerned, the minister will personally request the Auditor General to review the best start decisions and funding process and let us know exactly why she made the decision for zero Best Start spaces in Kawartha-Victoria. I challenge her to do that on behalf of the children and families in my riding.

Minister Chambers needs to stop pointing fingers at everyone else and stop taking out her personal vendettas on Ontario's vulnerable children. It's irresponsible and it's regrettable.

The bottom line is that you, Minister, are responsible for hurting the young children who will benefit most from the very thing you are denying them.

**LINDA BOUCHER AND
ADAM CONACHER**

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I rise in the House today to congratulate two wonderful teachers in Ottawa who recently won the Golden Apple Award as outstanding educators. Ms. Linda Boucher from Bishop Hamilton Montessori school and Mr. Adam Conacher from Henry Munro Middle School were both given the award recently.

The award was created by the Majic 100 radio station and the Alterna company, and it includes \$500 that the winners can spend on their students.

Ms. Boucher was nominated for the award by eight parents of her students, and said that she would spend the money on new material for her classroom. Mr. Conacher is known for using new technologies to enhance his students' learning experience. He plans to spend his winnings on new computer equipment for his students.

It's a pleasure for me to honour these two dedicated and outstanding educators by congratulating them in the Legislature today. Our government shares their desire to give our children the best education possible, and we've made it a priority to support teachers like these two individuals. For instance, we haven't lost a single school day to labour discord, unlike our predecessors. We've also increased provincial funding for education and hired over 7,000 new teachers. We've reduced class sizes and taken initiatives that have increased both test scores and graduation rates. We have also invested in new teaching materials for our children, and we are repairing and rebuilding schools across the province. We will continue to work alongside teachers like Ms. Boucher and Mr. Conacher to give our children an education that will help them to succeed.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): There is a growing crisis in this province due to a shortage of long-term-care beds. In October of this year, there were more than 18,000 people in Ontario on a waiting list for a bed—yes, 18,000 people. This is an increase of more than 4,000 from the year before in October.

In my community of Waterloo, 669 people are waiting. In Ottawa, the list sits at a staggering 1,349. And in North Bay, the number is over 300.

This shortage of beds is not only affecting the people waiting, but it is drastically affecting other areas of the health care system, especially hospitals, where many

beds are filled with patients waiting for a bed in a long-term-care home. As a result, surgeries are being postponed or even cancelled and patients are waiting hours or days in emergency rooms because there is no bed for them in the hospital. Yet this government has taken no action to address this critical shortage of beds.

An article in the North Bay Nugget on December 19 reinforces this fact by stating that the Ministry of Health has no “long-term or short-term vision” on how they’re going to manage this situation.

We have seen this lack of action before on the part of both the Liberal and NDP governments. No new beds were built in the province for 10 years prior to our government’s 1998 announcement and construction of 20,000 new beds. I say to the McGuinty government, it’s time for action now.

INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I rise in the House today to discuss the issue of public infrastructure renewal and the great strides this government has made to solidify Ontario as a leader in this area.

This government recognizes that the province is growing at a spectacular rate, a breathtaking rate, and we want to ensure that with this growth comes a sustainable strategy for the future—initiatives like the McGuinty government’s Places to Grow Act, which has not only been effective in helping communities to help develop these strategies, but it is also receiving international accolades.

As the minister mentioned yesterday, our government has won accolades for our growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe area, taking home the Daniel Burnham Award from the American Planning Association. The impact this plan will have on many communities like the ones in my riding will be enormous. The creation of more compact communities will mean that my constituents will be closer to amenities that will improve their quality of life—leisure areas such as parks and community centres, but also commercial areas for work and for shopping.

Another huge issue in my riding—and you’ve all heard me talk about it—is gridlock. The plan does help to improve in this area by providing access to different forms of transportation and helping to lessen reliance on cars and their inherent evils.

I just want to say that Places to Grow is a responsible plan that will help Ontario’s growth in a responsible and sustainable way, which is necessary.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I rise to tell members of this Legislature how the McGuinty government’s energy policy is hurting manufacturing in Ontario.

This month, OMYA Canada has laid off a small number of workers from its plant in Perth in my riding of Lanark–Carleton. It is shifting some of its production from its plant in Perth to Vermont and Alabama.

OMYA processes calcium carbonate and is the world’s leading producer of white fillers used in paper, drywall, toothpaste and other household and industrial products.

In a media release, Larry Sparks, the plant administrator, lists high energy prices as the main factor contributing to the layoffs. In this same release, he notes that steps have been taken to assist the forestry sector in northern Ontario with energy costs, while nothing has been done to help the mining sector or the manufacturing sector in eastern Ontario.

The president of OMYA, Olivier Chatillon, wrote to the Minister of Energy on June 1, 2006, supporting “an energy policy that is part of an industrial strategy for Ontario. The strategy would protect existing jobs and ensure companies are confident investing in Ontario.”

In spite of this urging of the president of this company six months ago, nothing has been done. The jobs have been lost.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): This past Tuesday, I met up with St. Nick here in the Legislature. He was taking a break from what’s a very hectic time in his work schedule to come and express his concern about the lack of action the McGuinty Liberals are taking on climate change. As a resident north of the Arctic Circle, he’s an eyewitness to the particularly pronounced impacts global warming is having.

In my meeting with St. Nick, I told him about the Ontario greenhouse gas reduction act I was introducing in the Legislature. This act obligates Ontario to reduce provincial greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol. Under the act, the minister would have to prepare a plan to reduce emissions. A plan of this nature needs to have energy efficiency and conservation at the core.

One proven way to reduce energy use is to retrofit older buildings. When I was a city councillor in Toronto, I founded the Better Buildings Partnership, a building retrofit program that to date has reduced CO₂ emissions in Toronto by 173,000 tonnes per year.

In 2005, a resolution was passed in this Legislature to expand the program province-wide. However, the funding to make this a reality has not happened. Likewise, a suite of aggressive conservation and efficiency programs have not been carried through.

The clock is ticking down on the existence of the North Pole, just as it’s ticking down on this presentation. This province needs to take action.

THIRD PARTY'S RECORD

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I rise in the House today to speak about the hard work the McGuinty government is doing while the third party continues to remain inconsistent on a number of issues that directly benefit Ontarians.

The leader of the third party has a tendency to say one thing while doing quite another. After saying that we need to protect our drinking water from source to tap, the honourable member then voted against the clean water legislation that would do the very thing he was advocating for. Also, after extolling the virtues of mandating renewable energy, such as solar and wind, he then came out against wind energy, saying it was too expensive.

These inconsistencies are not a new occurrence for the third party, and they continue to prevent progress for Ontarians through voting against valuable legislation like insulation pumps for diabetic children, ending the 60-hour work week and raising rates for those on social assistance, to name but a few. It seems that the third party would like to remain holier than thou, while still voting against valuable services that would change the lives of Ontarians for the better. The McGuinty government is proud of the legislation it has passed, and will continue to create new legislation that has a positive impact on Ontarians and their hard-working families.

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION'S RECORD

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): As another year ends, I'd like to spend a moment and talk about some of the things that just don't seem to change. The official opposition is now on its third leader in the last five years, and despite the fact that he's a new face from the old back rooms, the Progressive Conservative Party stands for the same tired, cynical approach that the people of Ontario rejected just a few short years ago.

While we on this side of the House invest in public health care in an effort to strengthen our greatest competitive advantage, they want to cut \$2.4 billion from the system. While we make public education the best education, they want to take hundreds of millions of dollars out so they can give it to private schools. While we pass legislation that ensures that all municipalities, big and small, urban and rural, are treated with the respect they deserve, they vote against it. And while we work to make Ontario an even better place to live, they vote against clean water, against insulin pumps for diabetic children and against investing in infrastructure. While we're working to make Ontario a leader in the knowledge economy, they travel the province mocking research on climate change as simply useless.

There is one other thing that won't change as we move forward, and that is that the people of Ontario can continue to count on the McGuinty government to always move forward, never backward.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): This being the last day in the Legislature before heading home to our ridings, I'd like to remind all Ontarians of what this government has done to move health care and education forward in recent months. To ensure that Ontarians have access to safe, quality services provided by the health professionals of their choice, we introduced legislation to regulate the profession of traditional Chinese medicine. Members of the TCM community have been diligently pursuing this legislation for years to ensure the health and safety of Ontarians. Well, this government has delivered. This is one way we moved our health care system forward this fall.

We didn't stop there. Not only do we want healthy people in the province of Ontario, we also want well-educated people. To have well-educated people, you have to provide the right opportunities. That's why we passed learning-to-18 legislation. Amongst other things, this bill gives young people, particularly those who are struggling in our classrooms or those who have given up altogether, a renewed sense of hope. It provides for new learning opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom. Providing hands-on experience outside the classroom allows certain students to fulfill their full potential. Giving them academic flexibility affords them more opportunity to succeed. When youth succeed, we all succeed, because children quite literally are our future.

By creating a healthy and well-educated population, we're strengthening the foundation of the province and providing a climate for prosperity.

Merry Christmas to everyone here in this Legislature.

VISITORS

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise today to recognize somebody in our gallery: Mrs. Farida Merchant. Mrs. Merchant is one of those unfortunate people who lost her husband to cancer. She had to send him down to the United States for treatment that could not be achieved here, and spent tremendous amounts of money on that treatment. But then when she came back to Canada with her husband, she has reached out to the Credit Valley Hospital and helped them raise a lot of money to improve the health care system here. I think it's very appropriate at Christmastime that we recognize the generosity of people like Farida Merchant.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I don't want to mow the lawn of my good friend the member from Northumberland, but I do want to remind members, if you'll give me a moment, that Rotary International is the oldest and largest service club around the world, and there is a Canadian, for the first time in 57 years, who is the president-elect. That is my father, who is visiting today: Wilf Wilkinson from Trenton, Ontario.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion related to a committee of the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent to move a motion related to a committee of the Legislature. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the following committee be authorized to meet during the winter adjournment: the standing committee on justice policy for the purpose of public hearings and clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 103, An Act to establish an Independent Police Review Director and create a new public complaints process by amending the Police Services Act, at the call of the Chair.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RENDEMENT SCOLAIRE

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Our government, the McGuinty government, knows that it is important for our students to develop a high level of literacy and numeracy in the early years. If we can help a child do well in reading, writing and math in elementary school, he or she is much more likely to do well in high school and beyond.

That's why I'm pleased today to announce that we're investing an additional \$10 million. About half a million students in grades 4 to 6 are expected to benefit from this investment.

Ces fonds supplémentaires aideront les conseils scolaires à se doter de ressources et de matériel d'apprentissage pour renforcer l'enseignement de la littérature et de la numératie au cycle moyen.

These resources include books, magazines, computer software and multimedia resources such as CD-ROMs and DVDs, so we're not just talking about textbooks, but a much broader range of materials. It's not just about putting books on desks; it's about reaching every student and breaking down the barriers to education and making sure all of them have the tools they need to learn. This \$10 million in funding is in addition to the \$15 million we provided earlier this year for library books.

We have two goals: We want to make sure that our outstanding teachers and education support staff have the materials they need to deliver their lessons and support to students. As well, we want to ensure that our students

have the resources they need to help them develop these core skills and to be successful.

L'an dernier, 64 % des élèves de 3^e et de 6^e année de l'Ontario ont atteint ou dépassé la norme provinciale en lecture, écriture et mathématiques, ce qui représente une hausse de 10 points de pourcentage par rapport au taux de 54 % en 2002-2003. Nous avons pour but de voir 75 % des élèves atteindre ou dépasser la norme provinciale d'ici 2008.

These results show us that we are reaching every student and helping them achieve higher levels of literacy and numeracy, and that means that more students have a solid foundation for future success.

I hope all members will agree that every single thing we can do to raise the bar on student achievement is good for our children and good for Ontario, and I hope that over the holidays we'll all be reading and our students in the province will be reading as well.

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HEALTHY LIVING

HABITUDES DE VIE SAINES

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): As the holiday season enters into full swing, I want to take this opportunity to wish all members the very best at this special time, happy holidays and merry Christmas.

This week, the Ministry of Health Promotion has partnered with a number of groups to bring the message regarding healthy holiday habits to all citizens of Ontario.

Earlier this week, I was pleased to visit George Brown College with Chef James Smith and Lynn Roblin, a well-known cookbook author and registered dietitian. Chef Smith and Ms. Roblin provided helpful tips on how Ontarians can enjoy a great holiday meal and do it with an eye to good nutrition and moderation.

My ministry's own website, EatRight Ontario, is a good place to get good, reliable information on nutrition, portion size, healthy weights and more. You can access this website through healthyontario.com. EatRight Ontario supports the ministry's mandate to help Ontarians lead healthier lives. It's one of the new programs that have come out of Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living launched by the government in June. The action plan responds to key findings in the chief medical officer of health's report, Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives. At this time, we want to thank Dr. Sheela Basur, the author of that report, and wish her the very best during this difficult time in her life. The report called for a province-wide effort to combat obesity.

Le plan d'action du gouvernement propose de nouveaux programmes et de nouvelles stratégies en plus de tirer parti de ceux actuellement en place pour promouvoir la saine alimentation et la vie active en Ontario.

Second, as my colleague the Minister of Tourism will be able to attest, Ontario's a great place to visit in winter. That's because of our tremendous outdoor winter sporting facilities. Winter sports are an excellent way to be

active while seeing the natural beauty of our province. Be it snowshoeing in Algonquin Park, skiing on one of the many hills, taking your family out to the Rideau Canal—although not until February's Winterlude—in my own hometown of Ottawa, or simply taking a brisk walk with family or friends, getting outdoors is a great way to exercise and enjoy the season.

Through the work of our ministry, we have made it easier for Ontarians to gain access to both indoor and outdoor recreational activities.

Our Ontario trails strategy is a \$3.5-million long-term plan that establishes strategic directions for planning, managing, promoting and using trails in our province. The executive director of the Ontario Trails Council, Mr. Patrick Connor, has said that the "economic benefits of the Ontario trails strategy will be felt right across Ontario. The recognition that trails are a multifaceted piece of infrastructure that helps people in so many ways is a significant milestone." I know Rob Benzie is getting down every word of this as I speak.

Through our communities in action fund, more than \$15.8 million in the last three years has been awarded to over 550 organizations at the provincial and local levels to increase access to sport and recreational activities regardless of age, ability or income—more than \$15.8 million into activities such as the North Bay Canoe Club, the Peel-Halton Youth Basketball Association in Mississauga, and Red Lake Indian Friendship Centre in Kenora, which I had the opportunity to visit.

Mon ministère et moi-même sommes fiers du rôle que nous jouons dans la promotion d'un Ontario en santé et d'une vie meilleure pour tous les Ontariens.

According to Statistics Canada, 59% of Canadians and almost 26% of children are either overweight or obese. The McGuinty government is on the side of families who want to see their children grow up to lead healthy, active lives, and we've made significant investments to help them do that.

Third and finally, as we pass the six-month mark with respect to the implementation of the Smoke Free Ontario Act, our government is proud of its accomplishments and recognizes the significant benefits inherent to a smoke-free Ontario. Smoking is responsible for more than \$2.6 billion in lost productivity each year and creates an added burden of at least \$1.7 billion. The province has recognized that when you invest in preventive measures such as the Smoke Free Ontario Act, you help Ontarians lead healthier lives with a reduced risk of lung cancer, heart disease and other physical ailments.

Specific to youth, the Ministry of Health Promotion has allocated \$8.8 million in youth prevention programs and expanded the Youth Action Alliance while also strengthening our cessation strategy with all the public health units across the province.

Members would be proud to note that our ministry's stupid.ca advertisement and website have won numerous awards and recognition from the advertising community, including Marketing Magazine's best pick and recognition by the International Academy of Digital Arts and

Sciences and the gold award at the Digital Marketing Awards just last year.

Through these three mechanisms, we have reminded Ontarians about the need to consider their health during the holidays. We're targeting the youngest of Ontarians in order to get the message out and make the biggest impact for the sustainability of our health care system.

I'm proud of our proactive support to wellness and the work that the men and women of our ministry have accomplished in just one short year. I want to also point out what a positive relationship we have developed and nurtured with our many and diverse stakeholders, from health NGOs to sport and recreation groups to public health units.

We are doing some tremendous work that I'm proud of. I want to thank members for their interest in the work that we've done and the announcements they've made on our behalf, whether it's the communities in action fund or the Quest for Gold program. To all members, in particular my two critics, Mr. Sterling and Ms. Martel, thank you very much for your constructive advice, particularly at the estimates committee.

Happy new year to all members of the House. Merci beaucoup.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): In response to the statement by the Minister of Education, this is yet another attempt by this government to deflect attention from the education funding shell game by the successive Liberal Ministers of Education. Hiding behind this latest dribble of funding, this government continues to ignore the single most important issue facing education in Ontario today, and that is the updating of the basic education funding formula, a promise that Dalton McGuinty made and that he and three successive ministers have failed to address.

The Minister of Education is the third minister in a row to ignore the appeals from every stakeholder in education to keep the Dalton McGuinty promise to update the funding formula. So I ask the minister, when you know that school boards across this province are in a funding crisis, why do you continue to ignore them? I remind you that your stakeholders, Minister, are abandoning you very rapidly.

At their press conference on October 20, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation voiced their ongoing concerns about the funding crisis facing school boards across the province. They challenged you, Minister, and pointed out that school boards across this province are dipping into reserves and cutting programs and services from front-line education to meet your program announcements that you and previous Ministers of Education failed to address with serious funding.

The words of Desiree Francis, the executive officer for the province of the OSSTF, are worth repeating: "We are now into the fourth year of the McGuinty government's

mandate and this government has still not addressed fundamental problems with the education funding formula. Three successive Ministers of Education have acknowledged the problems, but none has made the changes necessary to ensure school boards have adequate, stable funding to meet the needs of their students and communities."

Ms. Francis continues: "A substantial portion of all new education funding has been earmarked for specific ministry initiatives and has not helped boards cover the funding shortfall for core operating expenses. Even when the government did add \$600 million to the education budget last spring to bridge the funding gap for teacher salaries"—which, I remind you, you unilaterally negotiated and forced on boards—"it did so at the expense of the local priorities and learning opportunities grants. You put in \$600 million, but a total of \$511 million was removed from these grants. With the loss of this money, boards also lost what little flexibility they had to address local needs."

I continue with this quote: "Recently, Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne suggested that her government has taken a step-by-step approach to funding" and to changes in the funding formula. "We say, look again." Minister, this is the OSSTF talking to you. "As Hugh Mackenzie's recent analysis of education funding shows, in the 905 area alone the government's funding shell game has meant that two of the largest urban public boards, Peel and Toronto, actually have less funding per student in 2006-07 than in 1997. The chair of the Durham board says his board must tap into their reserves for the \$5 million they need to meet the costs of special education. In Niagara, transportation funding is still based on pre-1998 data."

That's the end of the quote from the OSSTF.

Minister, you guys have made a lot of announcements. You've failed to correct the fundamental flaws in the funding formula. You said you would. Get on with the job so boards can get on with their jobs.

HEALTHY LIVING

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I want to tell the minister I forgive him for not giving me a copy of his statement. In the spirit of the season, I did not rise on a point of privilege, even though it made it difficult for me to respond.

I call his attention to an article in the *Toronto Star*, given all of the platitudes which he heaped upon the McGuinty government with regard to what has been accomplished in the last year. That article is called "Dying Smoker Left Out in the Cold." It talks about Suzanne Penny, who's preparing for death, and one of her few remaining pleasures in her life are her cigarettes. She likely will die alone, and cigarettes are her only partner as she goes towards her death. The article clearly points out the point I made both in estimates and in this Legislature: There should have been some accommodation for those near death to continue smoking and not

be exposed to the elements, particularly this winter. Ms. Penny talks about—and this is her quote in the article: "It is quite delightful when it's dark and raining" to go out and have a cigarette.

1400

Unfortunately, this government would not listen, would not act with compassion when it was passing this particular law—a law which I support in many ways; I supported the bulk of it. I think it could have been done in a more genuine and compassionate way. That's a clear mark of failure of the McGuinty government during the last year.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In response to the statement that was made by the Minister of Health Promotion, I want to put on the record and give the minister some concrete recommendations that his government could and should implement if they really want to foster healthy habits in the province of Ontario:

(1) The government could give enough funding to the school system so that every school would have a qualified physical education teacher and every student in both the elementary and secondary panel would have access to regularly scheduled physical education classes.

(2) The government could accept all of the recommendations that were already made by the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health in March 2000 regarding healthy eating environments at school. The government should accept and implement all of those nine recommendations in the report entitled *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment*.

(3) The minister and his government could ban over-the-counter and behind-the-counter displays of cigarette packages in convenience stores now so that young people will not see them, will not be led to believe that smoking is normal and will not be enticed to start smoking in the first place.

(4) The government could pass Bill 164, the *Community Right to Know Act*, put forward by my colleague Peter Tabuns, so that consumers could be informed about labelling and about those products that contain known or suspected carcinogens.

(5) The government could pass my Bill 30, *Safe Needles Save Lives Act*, to ensure that Ontario workers can have access to safe needles and safe medical sharps in their workplaces and they won't contract serious or deadly diseases because they are forced to use conventional needles and sharps.

(6) The government could build the 20,000 affordable housing units that it promised in the last election. Only 1,638 have actually been built and most of these are just below market rate, so they can hardly be described as affordable.

(7) The government can remove the arbitrary and unfair restrictions they've imposed on ODSP recipients who are applying for a special diet supplement so those recipients can actually receive the supplements and nutritional food they medically need.

(8) The government could tie ODSP rates to the real cost of living so that the disabled in Ontario aren't forced

to fall further and further behind and face more and more serious financial hardship in the province.

(9) The government could raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour so that minimum wage workers can actually earn a living wage in Ontario. It's unacceptable that minimum wage workers working full time, 40 hours a week, are still living below the poverty line in Ontario. There are over 200,000 Ontarians who work for minimum wage; two thirds of them are women, and they and their families are living in poverty in this province.

(10) The government could fully stop the clawback of the national child benefit from Ontario's poorest families. In the fourth year of the McGuinty Liberal mandate, it is unacceptable that this government continues to clawback \$250 million of federal money from Ontario's poorest families. It's no accident that child poverty in Ontario is up from 16.1% last year to 17.4% this year. Over 330,000 Ontarians were forced to use food banks last year, and many of them were families who rely on the minimum wage and who continue to have federal money clawed back by this government despite the government's promise in the last election to end this disgusting practice. There are some concrete recommendations for the government if the government was truly interested in ensuring that everybody—everybody—was in a position to benefit from healthy habits in the province.

SAFER INTERNET DAY

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding Internet safety and that the question be put on the motion without debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Runciman has asked for unanimous consent. Agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Runciman: I move, on behalf of the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and NDP caucuses, that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize February 7, 2007, as Safer Internet Day as part of ongoing efforts to combat Internet crimes against children.

The Speaker: Mr. Runciman has moved, on behalf of the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and NDP caucuses, that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize February 7, 2007, as Safer Internet Day as part of ongoing efforts to combat Internet crimes against children. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg the indulgence of our House to thank our hard-working, enthusiastic pages, who have served us here for an additional week.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I don't suppose, in that spirit, there's any chance I can move a motion that the Premier give me his BlackBerry e-mail address so I could send him questions over the Christmas break. I'm willing to try it.

My question today is for the Premier. Today, the House voted on a bill that I introduced, Bill 178, the Truth and Transparency in the Justice System Act. Those in the McGuinty cabinet charged with taking care of the justice system voted against it. This is unfortunate because, had this bill proceeded, it would have shone some light on the justice system without compromising judicial independence. It would help us to know, on a province-wide basis, where we might have a problem and, frankly, where we don't. Even Alan Young, a professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, says, "We don't know if the current regime is effective."

My question to Premier is this: Will the Premier please advise the House why he clearly gave orders to the vast majority of his MPPs to vote against transparency in the justice system?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm delighted to have the opportunity to explain to the leader of the official opposition why it is that we do not support this initiative. This is designed to get tough on judges. We choose to get tough on crime. There's big difference. Instead of Americanizing our justice system by some veiled attempt to intimidate judges, we're attacking crime. We have 1,000 new police officers, 63 new judges, 83 new crown attorneys; we have a guns and gangs task force; we've provided \$5 million in addition to combat child pornography; we've introduced the only legislation of its kind to Canada on mandatory gunshot wound reporting, and it's been passed; the Attorney General recently opened up a new major crime court here; and we've been working with the federal government to toughen our bail and sentencing provisions throughout the country. It seems to me those are positive, proactive, constructive ways to deal with crime. We'll attack crime; we'll let them attack judges.

1410

Mr. Tory: Only the Premier could construe the notion of putting province-wide facts on the table about bail violations and about sentencing deals and plea bargains as intimidating anybody. The only people who are intimidated here are the government of Dalton McGuinty, who are intimidated by putting these facts on the table. This bill would do nothing more than allow people to see how well the system is operating on an aggregate basis across the province. How often, across the province, are people violating bail conditions? How often are sureties collected, or not, across the province for people who violate their bail? How often, across the province, are we seeing

sweetheart sentencing deals and sentencing credits? That is the information we sought to see collected and sought to see put into the public domain on a province-wide basis so that we could maintain respect for the law and the justice system.

It seems your government has time for committees and commissions and all kinds of things on decorations in courtrooms, but no time at all for making facts available to the public. Why are you opposed to having a transparent justice system so people can see justice done, see how it's done and understand how the system works?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: You know, the Conservative Party leader says that this is about collecting province-wide data, but his colleague and justice critic Mr. Runciman says, "I think ... the public has a right to know what's going on in individual courts." The Tories have tried this in the past. They introduced a bill, and this is how Chief Justice McMurtry himself responded. He said, it's "a rather heavy-handed and irresponsible attempt to intimidate judges in the sentencing process. All I can do is express the hope that ... the members of the Legislature would have the good sense to not proceed with such legislation." That legislation is of the same variety as this particular initiative. This wolf has now been dressed up in sheep's clothing, but underneath it's the same wolf and the same fundamental attempt to intimidate judges. We choose to attack crime; we'll let them attack the judges.

Mr. Tory: To suggest that this bill, which seeks to put information on the table of what goes in courts, attacks judges is absolute rubbish. It's absolute rubbish. The public have the right to know, collected on a province-wide basis, this information about what actually goes on in courtrooms. We should have that information here, as people who are charged with the responsibility of making the laws that are being interpreted and enforced in those courtroom. But this government cannot tell us and will not tell us how many people skip bail. They can't tell us and they won't tell us how long people are waiting for a trial. This is information the people of Ontario have a right to know so we'll know if there's a problem or not, and, quite frankly, so that if there isn't a problem, we won't concern ourselves with it and we can bolster confidence in the justice system. It is not an attack on judges, it's an attack on secrecy. It is a bill that is in favour of putting the information in the public's hands so they can judge.

My question is this: The Attorney General says the justice system is ready for its close-up. Part of that close-up should be province-wide facts on how the system is working and what's going on. Why did you order this shot down?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: You know, suddenly the leader of the official opposition has become a champion of transparency. He represents a government that chose to hide wait times. He represents a government that chose to hide a deficit. He represents a government that chose to hide expenditures at the children's aid societies. He represents a government that chose to hide Hydro sal-

aries. Suddenly, today, he proclaims himself to be a champion of transparency and openness and accountability, which is a new thing.

Again, I choose to be with Mr. Chief Justice McMurtry, who said it's "a rather heavy-handed and irresponsible attempt to intimidate judges in the sentencing process." There may be some small politics to be found in that kind of an approach. We choose to attack crime; let them attack the judges of Ontario.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, Premier, I stood in this House and we raised 45 specific instances—based on your own website, the website on which you based your television ads—where wait times for priority treatments are on the rise. One of those was Southlake hospital. I see the minister was there for a photo op today. It has seen a 51% increase in cancer surgery wait times. Yesterday we had 45 specific instances where wait times are on the rise. The TV ads have been found by Advertising Standards Canada to be inaccurate and to omit relevant information. And, of course, the website information, on the shy side, has been found to be misleading by the Auditor General. As the advertising standards council indicated in its letter, wait times have not been reduced for all procedures across the province.

Why do you continue to refuse to apologize for the fact that you put these ads on television, paid for with taxpayers' money, and that you put inaccurate information on television and withheld relevant data from the public? Why won't you apologize?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The leader of the official opposition enjoys barking up this particular tree, but there is nothing to be found. He will know that all the advertising that we put forward in Ontario has been subject to approval by the Provincial Auditor. He will know that waits in fact have come down for angiography, for angioplasty, for cataract surgeries, for hip replacement, for knee replacements, for MRIs and CT scans.

He may not know that there are 10 cancer surgeries that are now being tracked. They chose to hide all this information in the past. We've chosen to make it public because we think it's important. He may not know that seven of 10 different types of cancer surgeries have seen decreases across the board, and we are experiencing three areas of increase.

What we can now do on the basis of this information is target our resources. The minister has asked for a plan from Cancer Care Ontario. He's received that plan and we look forward to acting on that information.

Mr. Tory: I challenge the Premier to have the auditor come forward and say he passed any judgment whatsoever on the accuracy of those ads, because he didn't, and you know it.

Yesterday, the Premier claimed there were 160 hospitals reporting on the wait times website, the one the

Auditor General found contained misleading information. This is yet one more inflated claim from the Premier with respect to wait times. The fact is that there is nowhere near that number of hospitals reporting on the website. Only 45 of 68 hospitals that perform cancer surgeries report their wait times. Only 41 of 70 hospitals that do CT scans are reporting their wait times.

One that isn't reporting is Kemptville District Hospital. A recent CBC report says their operating rooms are being rented out for for-profit facelifts for out-of-the-country customers while patients in Ottawa wait 105 days for cancer surgery, 309 days for cataracts, 431 days for hip and knee replacements, 100 days for an MRI. Why do you allow these operating rooms to be rented out for for-profit facelifts when you have people in Ottawa, very close by, waiting hundreds of days to get treatment?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Just so we can introduce a bit of the other side of the picture—and I understand that the job of the leader of the official opposition is to bring a rather one-dimensional approach to this—we've got a responsibility to ensure Ontarians have all the information.

There have been some successes in cancer, and I've talked about how they have seen real successes in seven of 10 areas: At the Guelph General Hospital they've had a 35.1% decrease in wait time; Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, down by 24.6%; Queensway Carleton, down by 26.8%; Peterborough Regional hospital, down by 38%; Mount Sinai, down by 53.4%.

The leader of the official opposition stands in this House and says that we've got some challenges with respect to cancer wait times, and we do. The reason we know this is because we've actually collected this information and made it public for the very first time. On the basis of that collected information, we can now focus our energies, focus our resources and make a real difference. That's how we've addressed other areas where wait times have advanced and that's why we're going to continue to—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: The information that you have made public has been described by the Auditor General to be misleading and to be taken with a grain of salt. So there's a big commendation for that. The advertising standards council goes on to say that the ads that promoted that same information are inaccurate and leave people with mistaken impressions about wait times.

You talked about three or four hospitals. Let me give you the aggregate numbers: 40% of the hospitals reporting wait times for cancer surgeries have seen an increase since August 2005; 45% of the hospitals reporting MRI wait times have seen an increase since August 2005—we're not talking about a couple of hospitals here—64% of the hospitals reporting wait times for bypass surgery have seen an increase since August 2005.

You started to admit the truth on this yesterday when you said that in cancer surgery wait times they were going up. It's the first glimmer of hope we've had after

the misleading information as described by the auditor, after the inaccurate ads. Finally, yesterday, you started to come clean. Why don't you come clean on the rest of this and admit these ads and these numbers have been creating a false impression for the people of Ontario and that you should apologize, especially for those ads that you wasted the taxpayers' money on?

1420

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Never have the people of Ontario been subjected to so much doom and gloom. To listen to the leader of the official opposition, you would think the entire province was going to heck in a hand-basket.

We're proud of the fact that we're collecting information which makes the leader of the official opposition a little bit uncomfortable. They chose to hide deficits. We're going to make sure that there's a new law—in fact, we've made sure that that kind of information is never hidden from Ontarians again. We're collecting wait time information. We're collecting information about hydro salaries and making that public. We're collecting information about children's aid societies and making that information public as well. Does this create challenges for the government of the day? You're darn right it does. But we're prepared roll up our sleeves and take this on. The only thing I would ask the leader of the official opposition to do is to give us a little bit of credit for being pioneers in this area, for getting wait times down in a number of areas, for acknowledging that we've got some difficulties in continuing areas and that we're going to keep moving and we will be relentless in our pursuit of getting more wait times down throughout our health care system.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): A question for Premier: Over the last two years under McGuinty government, over 140,000 good-paying manufacturing jobs have been lost in Ontario. New Democrats have called for affordable hydro rates to help sustain jobs in the forest sector and we've called for the creation of a job commissioner's office, someone who can work with manufacturers and forest product companies to sustain and protect jobs. Your government has responded by simply holding one PR exercise after another. Premier, as more and more manufacturing jobs continue to be lost, why is the McGuinty government continuing to be missing in action in terms of sustaining and protecting good-paying jobs in Ontario?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The leader of the NDP, of course, holds himself out as being a champion of working families in Ontario and he has brought a particular focus of late on job opportunities. But let's take a look at the record, understanding, of course, that 270,000 net new jobs have been created in our province, something the leader of the NDP has failed to acknowledge yet. When it came to insulin pumps for diabetic children—

that would have helped families—they voted against that. When it came to lowering auto insurance rates—again, that would help families—they voted against that. Ending the 60-hour workweek: voted against. Ending mandatory retirement: voted against. Some 15,000 new affordable child care spaces: voted against. Ending the national child benefit clawback on a go-forward basis: voted against. Raising rates for those on social assistance: voted against. Raising rates for those on ODSP: voted against. Keeping out two-tier health care: voted against. Ending the private school giveaway: voted against. They say one thing and they do another.

Mr. Hampton: I don't know what world the Premier is living in, but your government is still clawing back \$250 million a year from the lowest-income kids in the province. At the same time that you've found the time to give yourself a 31% pay increase, you continue to take money away from the lowest-income kids in the province. I don't know what world you're living in, but you're not living in the world of working families, that's for sure.

But I want to ask you about other workers, health care workers, who continue to face health and safety risks in their workplaces because we do not employ safe needles in Ontario's health care facilities. The member for Nickel Belt has proposed legislation that would see safe needles introduced into our health care facilities so that workers wouldn't put their lives at risk from needle-stick injuries. Your government has refused to act on that front as well. Can you tell health care workers across Ontario how you found time to raise your own pay by 31% but you don't have time to address their health and safety needs?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's a privilege to have a chance to speak to the issues of health and safety related to health care workers.

Everybody agrees that it's crucial that health care environments be safe places. Indeed, we know that there's more progress to be made, but we're proud of the steps that we've been able to take. We've invested approximately \$100 million of the people's money to install, as an example, ceiling-mounted bed lifts, which we know have eased significantly the strain for many of our nurses. We have spent more than \$10 million on the implementation associated with new technology related to needle sticks.

The Minister of Labour has also taken initiatives through a council which involves many health care organizations and representatives of workers with a view toward doing more to make these environments safer.

I think that this is an area where there's an acknowledgement that good steps have been taken. Indeed, there will always be more that can be done to make these environments safe, and we work with all of those partners, especially the representative front-line workers, to do so.

Mr. Hampton: The reality is that there are 33,000 needle-stick injuries in our health care facilities every

year, and many of those are life-threatening in terms of the diseases or the infections that can be communicated as a result of those needle-stick injuries.

But I want to ask about the minimum wage. When my colleague the member for Parkdale-High Park introduced legislation calling for a \$10 minimum wage, members of the McGuinty government were very quick to condemn it, but you were also very quick to pass your own 31% pay increase, something that amounts to about \$28,000 a year.

Premier, can you tell all of those hard-working people out there who work for a minimum wage that is not a living wage how it is that your government can ram through a 31% pay increase for MPPs but you can't do anything for workers who want simply a \$10 minimum wage?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: To the Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The NDP again raised their violent objection to this pay hike, but of course they're going to take it. I guess Mr. Hampton has yet to make the announcement—I look forward to that provision in their platform—that specifically says they're going to roll back this pay hike. I look very much forward to seeing that in their platform as yet further demonstration of their commitment to putting their money where their mouths actually are. They maintain that they're interested in working people, but again I would ask them: Why did they oppose raising rates for those on social assistance? Why did they oppose raising rates for those on ODSP? Why did they oppose ending the 60-hour workweek in Ontario? Why did they oppose lowering auto insurance rates? Why did they oppose bringing in insulin pumps for our diabetic children?

Again, I would ask the Ontario public to take a long, hard, close look at the NDP and notice the tremendous gap between what they say and what they actually do.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: The question is to the Premier. I do invite people to take a long look, because I'll contrast my record with keeping my word with your record of breaking your promises anywhere across Ontario, Premier; anywhere. And I will contrast my record of donating the MPP pay increase to charities to your record of putting it in your pocket any day as well.

But I want to ask about some other workers—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Order.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: I want to ask the Premier about some other workers. Firefighters, we know, contract cancers as a result of chemicals and compounds that they come in contact with in terms of their daily work.

My colleague for Hamilton East, Andrea Horwath, introduced legislation which would do what other jurisdictions have done: Presume that, where certain cancers occur in the lives of firefighters, it is a result of workplace health and safety contact, workplace health and safety risk.

Once again, Premier, the McGuinty government found the time to ram through a pay increase for itself, but you have no time, it seems, to ensure that firefighters who risk their lives on an almost daily basis have these cancers and these working conditions recognized in terms of workers' compensation. Why are you in such a hurry to ram through the pay increase, but you have no time for the health and safety risks of those firefighters?

1430

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): We as a government value the good work that our firefighters have done, and we've certainly recognized that as a government since we have taken office.

As an example, as the firefighters advocated for OMERS autonomy in this province, we moved forward with that. The NDP voted against that. We moved forward with \$30 million in providing front-line assistance to our firefighters in this province. There was no acknowledgement from the NDP on that. As well, we're working very closely with our firefighters. My parliamentary assistant, Mario Racco, conducted a comprehensive review of occupational disease within firefighters' ranks.

We're working very closely with the firefighters on a number of fronts; we have the WSIB working group. It amazes me that we've moved forward. When this individual was in government—right now they talk the talk, but we walk the walk. We're committed to our firefighters. They never demonstrated any commitment to our firefighters. We'll continue to work with them.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government talks about comprehensive review. What it's been, in terms of workers' compensation, is nothing other than comprehensive delay.

But I want to ask about another issue that is very important for working families. Increasingly, working families, especially in larger urban areas, are having trouble dealing with skyrocketing property tax assessment. The response of the McGuinty government has been to delay the issue until after the next election.

New Democrats have put forward a proposal, which was followed in a number of other jurisdictions, which ensures greater fairness in terms of the property tax assessment system—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'm trying to relate the supplementary to the original question. I'm sure you'll do that for me.

Mr. Hampton: I will, Speaker. This is a very important issue for working families across the province. It's another one that the McGuinty government has failed to respond to. Can the Premier tell us why?

Hon. Mr. Peters: I'll continue the pinball game and forward this to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Lots of people have looked at the proposal that the NDP has put forward on property tax, and I should tell my friends in this House and the people who are watching that it is

universally described as one that would only create greater and more severe inequities.

What we have done in light of the Ombudsman's report is to cancel the next two property assessments because we believe that the Ombudsman put forward recommendations that are worthy of implementation. We have an obligation as well, I tell my friend the leader of the third party, to give the people of Ontario a property tax assessment system that is fair, transparent, equitable, workable and reasonable for municipalities right across Ontario, and that is precisely what we are doing.

Mr. Hampton: I think people across Ontario, especially working people, recognize that what the McGuinty government's going to do is hit people with a triple whammy in terms of property tax assessment increases after the next election.

My question is for the Premier. I've outlined five areas where New Democrats have put forward workable, practical proposals to improve the lives of working people. You've spent the greater part of the last week and a half simply ramming through a 31% pay increase for yourself. Can you tell us, please: When did the issues that matter to working families—like sustaining jobs, having a higher minimum wage, ensuring greater health and safety in our health care facilities—all become unimportant issues while the McGuinty government rams through a pay increase for itself?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Let me just try and deal with the preamble to my friend's question, because it's right there that we find the reason why the leader of the third party lacks credibility on so many issues in absolutely every corner of the province.

Let me complete the matter on property taxes. What he proposes on property taxes would have the most detrimental impact on young families who buy new homes in communities that are well established. What he wants is for one ratepayer to pay property tax at a very low rate and families who come into those communities and buy a new house on a property that has been revalued to pay a much higher level of property tax—about as inequitable and unfair and inappropriate as you could do in redesigning the system. It's those kinds of preposterous proposals that deny that member credibility on all the other issues that he cares to lecture us about in this Parliament or around the province.

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. Today, Premier, the Toronto Star republished an editorial from the St. Catharines Standard entitled "Time for a Reality Check on Caledonia." They suggested first of all, interestingly enough, that you and your minister need to get down to Caledonia, as I've done, to see the situation on the ground. They say that "people on both sides of this dispute are living ... a reality of tension teetering on the brink of violence."

They go on to say, "It's shameful that the province would be proud" of their record. They say, "There cannot be different classes of law for different classes of people. That undermines the very equality we strive for and cherish in Canada."

They go on to say, "The rule of law is paramount in Canada's society and must be upheld."

This is the very message we've been bringing to this House for months and months and months: one standard, one set of laws we all respect at all times.

Today is the first day of winter. That was the time beyond which you said it would be unacceptable for this occupation to continue. Do you maintain that view or have you changed your mind, as you've done on so many other things?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister responsible for aboriginal affairs.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): When this occurrence happened and we were first getting questions in the House, I had asked for the assistance of all the members of the Legislature, as we thought this was obviously a province-wide concern and challenge. But we took an approach, and then of course we had a judicial action that questioned our approach. So we had to take a pause on that approach, and we appealed it. The appeal court of Ontario has basically supported the approach that we've taken and said that the approach is legitimate, that it's lawful within the rule of law, and that we should proceed with that to try to settle this dispute. That's what we're doing.

Mr. Tory: In fact, it was the Premier of Ontario who said it would not be acceptable for these people to remain on the land past the first day of winter. He said it. He set that standard. He set that deadline—not us, not the courts, not anybody else—and now clearly he has changed his mind, as he does on just about everything. It's no wonder that the people of Caledonia have no confidence left in this government. It's no wonder that the occupiers of the disputed land feel no compunction to leave—not while the government says one thing on one day and another thing on another day.

Another example of this is the promise from your colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to provide compensation for homeowners. That was on June 16. At that time, he said he would ask an existing committee to look into it. Six months have passed and nothing has happened. The other day, we hear you, the minister of aboriginal affairs, saying, "It's time for another committee to look into this." We already had a committee looking into it six months ago. Maybe by spring you'll have a subcommittee or a joint committee. Self-imposed deadlines come and go with this government.

I have sat and listened to these people, who, I can assure you, have genuinely suffered. When are you going to stop appointing committees and subcommittees and

joint committees and actually do something for them? Get on with it.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I've been working with my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on this. He and I are of the same mind: that we want to get this right. We've talked to the community at large, besides the specific homeowners who have been directly impacted by this, and decided that this is not just an issue for those immediately impacted homeowners but also an issue for the community as a whole. So, in working with the community, they want some input on this and to have a say on this. This is an approach consistent with what we've been doing with the federal government.

You have to remember that now the federal government has the lead role at the table. The federal government supports what we've been doing in our actions with them, so we have Minister Jim Prentice and Prime Minister Stephen Harper onside with this approach.

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COAL-FIRED GENERATING STATIONS

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is to the Premier. Ontarians are well aware of your broken promises to close the coal plants. Those plants continue to spew greenhouse gases and smog-causing chemicals into the air. Yet few are aware that in 2005, while you were promising to close those plants come hell or high water, greenhouse gas emissions at both Nanticoke and Lambton increased by 20%.

Ontarians expect real action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Will you move today, Premier, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this province and put Bill 179, the Ontario Climate Change Act, forward for second reading and to committee for public hearings? Will you make that commitment?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): The member cites some statistics that were released yesterday. I would remind him that since 2003, the complete time frame of this government, coal emissions are down 17%; SO_x is down 28%; NO_x is down 33%; CO₂ is down 15%; mercury is down 32%.

Worldwide, there will be 249 new coal plants coming online by 2009. This is the only jurisdiction in the world that is moving to replace coal-fired generation. It has proven to be an enormous challenge, but it's one this government is up to and one we will continue to push.

The amount of emissions that we have cut from coal today is the equivalent of taking 1.1 million vehicles off the road. No government anywhere has a record as good as the McGuinty government when it comes to dealing with the emissions at coal-fired plants.

Mr. Tabuns: It's interesting that the Minister of Energy essentially replicates what was said by the Premier the other day. But the reality is that Environment Canada, the body charged with reporting greenhouse gas emissions in Canada, reported yesterday that greenhouse

gas emissions in Ontario increased in 2005, the last year for which data is available. So a beacon of hope? A leading body? No. In fact, this is a jurisdiction where greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. You've got a record that's as wonderful as the federal Liberals on this one.

Premier, you're supposed to be taking action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. That's not happening. They're going up. When will you take real action? When will you bring forward the Ontario Climate Change Act to this Legislature for debate? When will you bring it forward so it can be adopted?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The member likes to selectively use statistics. He cites only 2005, the summer that we had the worst heat wave. When you look at the three-year trend, all the numbers are down.

That is consistent with his and his party's position. He says, "Close the coal plants." His leader goes to northern Ontario and says, "Keep them open." Now he's not only saying, "Keep the northern plants open," his leader now says, "Keep the plants in southern Ontario open as backup."

I was proud to use the same numbers my Premier used in this House. I'm proud to be part of a government that's doing more than any government anywhere to reduce its reliance on coal, to reduce CO₂, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Ontario is the leader. This government and this Premier are leaders. That party and that leader have different positions in different parts of the province on every day of the week—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): My question is for the Minister of Health. One of the key components of the Transparent Drug System for Patients Act was the co-operation and the dialogue that had been fostered with pharmaceutical companies. As the member for Mississauga West—or, as we're sometimes known, pill hill—it's very important for residents of western Mississauga that Ontario maintains a strong working relationship with pharmacists, with generic manufacturers and with big pharma. There's been a lot of discussion in the Legislature about funding new and innovative drugs, but we all know that these drugs don't come cheap. Yesterday, you mentioned in the House that 23 new brand-name drugs were listed on the Ontario Drug Benefit Formulary. I'm glad to see that your ministry is working to get new products to market quickly, and I'm also concerned about how patients are going to benefit from these additions to the Ontario drug formulary. Minister, what type of impact will these products have on patients' lives?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): If I might, I want to thank the member from pill hill for the excellent question. Anyone who has driven up Mississauga Road in the

area the honourable member speaks of has seen, as an example, at GlaxoSmithKline, one of the largest global pharmaceutical companies, tremendous new investment.

We're very proud that, as a result of the initiatives we've been able to undertake more recently, Avandia, a featured product of GlaxoSmithKline, is now available to people with type 2 diabetes, alongside Actos, another diabetes product. We know anemia has a significant impact on quality of life for cancer patients and can also delay treatment. That's why two cancer chemo-related drugs to treat anemia have been added to the Ontario drug formulary.

In addition, drugs related to cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, osteoporosis, HIV/AIDS, cystic fibrosis and transplantation are all part of a package of 23 new research-based pharmaceutical industry product that has been made available to enhance the quality of care for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Delaney: This type of increased access to drugs for cancer and diabetes are undoubtedly going to mean happier holidays for countless Ontarians, including many in western Mississauga.

Another objective of the Transparent Drug System for Patients Act was to do away with the dreaded section 8 process. Many physicians have met and spoken with me about the burden of paperwork associated with section 8 applications. The time required to submit these requests meant valuable time that they could have spent on patient care but instead spent on filling out forms and working on process.

Minister, now that this law has been in effect for a little more than two months, have the changes that were put in place started to show new results?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: In Ontario, obviously, pharmaceutical product is an important part of the health care system for people. Indeed, one of the things we found when we came to office was that our doctors and patients were together burdened by a lot of bureaucratic process, which was referred to as section 8.

Through initiatives that we've undertaken so far to move product from a listing which required a bunch of paperwork, we've made it more accessible. The implication of this is that we've reduced, so far, 25% of the section 8 requests. What that really means is that on 40,000 distinct occasions, doctors and patients together have been freed from the burden of some bureaucratic process and, instead, the doctors, through their good conscience, have been able to provide the prescriptions to individual Ontarians. This is a tangible example of the improvement to access for patients, and at the same time, reducing a tremendous bureaucratic burden from Ontario's hard-working doctors.

LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. As you know, the softwood lumber dispute has been hard on Ontario's lumber industry. Just this week, Bowater said

the softwood lumber deal was a contributing factor in the closure of their Ignace sawmill. But the deal has been particularly difficult for Ontario's small and medium-sized lumber remanufacturers. These exporters add value to Ontario's lumber resources. Between 2001 and 2006, during the course of the dispute, small and medium-sized Ontario lumber producers lost 65% of their exports to the United States. Now I understand that you forwarded an opinion to the federal government regarding softwood lumber quota allocations that will result in less for remanufacturers, because you are proposing a 5% clawback. Why are you and your government abandoning Ontario's small and medium-sized lumber producers? Why won't you stand up for Ontario's value-added lumber exporters right now and support a set-aside for our remanufacturers?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): We want to make sure that all our lumber manufacturers have equal opportunity to produce and export lumber around the world, especially to the United States. I would just correct the member to say that I do not have any clawback at all. All the quota available has been allocated or, rather, I should say recommended to the federal government to allocate. The member has to realize that the federal government owns the quota. They are taking our recommendations only, but it will be the federal government that owns the quota and manages the running rules over the next seven years of the agreement of how the quota is finally allocated.

1450

Mr. Miller: In the spring, the federal trade minister said that Ontario's "Independent remanufacturers have been very seriously hit by the softwood lumber dispute.... They've been disproportionately hurt. What we have to focus on is how they benefit disproportionately going forward." That was David Emerson in May 2006.

Minister, why is Ontario abandoning its lumber remanufacturers and not working with the federal government to ensure that our remanufacturers benefit moving forward? At a time when the minister should be offering a hand up to Ontario's small and medium-sized producers, why aren't you willing to support the establishment of a set-aside to assist remanufacturers' return to traditional export volumes? Minister, will you take steps today to advise the federal government accordingly?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: We have made our final recommendations to the federal government, but obviously the federal government, as the final decision-maker, has the ability to adjust the recommendations that come from Ontario, and if they see fit to make any recommendations, being the owner of the quota and being in charge of the running rules of that quota, they can do that.

I would also like to say to the member that maybe we're a little too dependent on that one particular market. I was in Ottawa, with the great assistance of my colleague the member from London-Fanshawe, and had a meeting with 16 diplomats from the Middle East to talk about opening up new markets for Ontario. I've talked to

our manufacturers about that, and we're going to start to open some doors so that we can start exporting our good Ontario lumber to the rest of the world.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Labour. On November 10, Shela Mirza, a health and safety inspector, went to Humber River Regional Hospital, Finch site, in response to a complaint involving the safe use and disposal of safety-engineered medical devices in the birthing unit. She issued four orders requiring the hospital to provide safe needles to workers in the ICU, the OR, the birthing unit and in complex continuing care by February 12, 2007. The hospital has applied to the Ontario Labour Relations Board to suspend the orders, and the hospital's main argument is, "If the use of needles and sharps poses a serious danger to the health and safety of workers, it is presumed that the Ministry of Labour would not allow thousands of workers at hospitals and medical facilities across Ontario to continue to use these instruments without requiring the implementation of safety-engineered medical devices."

Minister, your lack of action on safe needles is now undermining your own health and safety inspectors. More importantly, your lack of action is putting workers at risk. Why don't you adopt my bill on safe needles so your inspectors can do their job without being undermined and workers can finally be protected?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I thank the member for the question. One thing that we have put forward that has not been done in the province of Ontario is that we recognize the importance of establishment of a section 21 health and safety committee. For the first time ever in the history of this province, we have brought both sides to the table to discuss issues of concern within the health care facilities in this province. We've got good individuals on that committee. I have met that committee and I can tell you, one of the first things that they are looking at are safety-engineered needles. They're going to be looking at that and I look forward to the recommendations that will come back to me and the Minister of Health.

But as well, we've invested \$11.6 million through the Ministry of Health in the medical safety-engineered sharps initiative. As well, we've made an unprecedented commitment to hire an additional 200 health and safety inspectors for this province, something that was severely lacking in Ontario. Many of those inspectors are dedicated strictly for the health care sector. When it comes to her specific question, the member should know I can't comment on any specific issue.

Ms. Martel: Because of the minister's lack of action on safe needles, his own health and safety inspectors are being undermined when they're trying to do their job. This issue is a top priority for the four unions that represent more than 175,000 health care workers in

Ontario, those who are most at risk of suffering a needle-stick injury.

By September 2004, those same unions had already participated in three meetings with the Ministry of Labour's health care health and safety group and told the former Minister of Labour that safe needles was their number one priority. That message was repeated again in July 2005-06, when the four unions again wrote to the minister, the Premier and the Minister of Health asking for action on safe needles. Five other provinces have already moved to protect workers with safe needles. Why won't Ontario adopt my bill, protect the public and ensure that your health and safety inspectors aren't undermined by your inaction?

Hon. Mr. Peters: I reiterate: The commitment that we made to hire 200 additional health and safety inspectors is unprecedented in this province, and I think it demonstrates that our goal is to ensure that we have safe workplaces for our health care workers.

As well, when the member made reference to the former minister, that the former minister listened to those concerns that were brought forward at that time—the former minister met with the Ministry of Health, and that's why we moved forward with the unprecedented \$11.5-million investment into safety medically engineered devices.

As well, we listened as a government. We listened to both sides: We listened to management and we listened to labour. One of the things that they said was sorely lacking in this province was a section 21 committee for health care workers. That had not been in place in this province. I'm proud to say that we listened to both sides. We listened to what had been brought forward, and this past fall, for the first time in the history of Ontario, a section 21 committee has been established. I look forward to hearing those recommendations.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, as you are well aware, garbage is a big concern for my constituents in London. They have real concerns about the disposal and diversion of municipal garbage. One problem appears to be that each municipality has a different approach to how they plan to deal with their waste. There's a real patchwork approach to planning for waste disposal and diversion across the province. This means, Minister, that municipalities often do not have an open and transparent long-term plan on how they will deal with future waste issues.

Minister, waste management is a fact of life. It affects municipalities, large and small, across the province, but what is the province's role and responsibility in this issue?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I want to thank the member for London North Centre for her advocacy on behalf of her community and those in and around the area of the London community. I

want to assure the member that our government, unlike past governments, is taking a different approach. Unlike the NDP, who sought to impose waste on 59 municipalities through an interim waste authority, we're not taking that direction. Unlike the former Tory government who hid away on the issue, that's not the direction we're taking either. In fact, our government continues to provide, and will do so in the future, real leadership to tackle waste produced by our society and to increase diversion. We've done things like announce an LCBO bottle return initiative where tonnes and tonnes of glass will now be diverted from landfills. Just last week, I directed Waste Diversion Ontario to develop a plan for household hazardous waste. We will be dealing with e-waste and now I am taking the leadership on behalf of all ministers of environment through the CCME to further reduce packaging that we create.

Ms. Matthews: As I've said, this is a very important issue to my community of London North Centre, which is why I'm glad to know that we finally have a government in Ontario that's prepared to provide leadership on this important issue. This is the only way municipalities will have the help they need in the future when planning for all forms of waste.

Minister, when residents in the London area heard that the city of Toronto bought the Green Lane landfill site in our community, we resented the thought that Toronto's sewage sludge was going to be dumped in our region. Londoners agreed with me when I said that London was not Toronto's toilet. We're all relieved to hear that Toronto has confirmed that they will, in fact, not be sending their sewage sludge to London. Minister, this is very good news. Can you please tell me how your initiatives will help my community of London North Centre?

1500

Hon. Ms. Broten: Green Lane landfill, as you know, has existed since the mid-1970s and has always been a good neighbour. I again spoke to Mayor Miller yesterday, and he reiterated his intention for the city of Toronto to continue to be a good neighbour to that community. As Minister of the Environment, I'm absolutely committed to ensuring that the community around Green Lane is protected and that the local environment won't be compromised.

On so many fronts, we continue to work with municipalities in ongoing dialogue for long-term, more sustainable plans for dealing with garbage. We want to encourage those municipalities to work within their communities and share their best practices beyond their community to increase waste diversion, to look at new technologies. Other initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of the Environment include new rules to remove restrictions on recycling, working on the environmental assessment requirements, and ensuring that we see more construction of recycling and composting facilities across the province.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, over a year ago you would know that the region of Durham passed a resolution calling on you for the rapid expansion of the Highway 407 east project. For your information, I'll read that resolution here: "That the Highway 407 east extension through Durham be expedited without further delays, including the completion of the ongoing environmental assessment, detailed design and construction."

Minister, your own Places to Grow document clearly stresses the importance of economic infrastructure such as the 407. In fact, if your plan right now is in gridlock on that file—even today, in the media, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority is unravelling, as you know, with the governance model.

Minister, the municipalities of Durham region, the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce, the Clarington Board of Trade and business and agricultural leaders are calling for your action on this file. What will you do to fast-track the 407 east completion?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'm pleased to be able to respond to the member. The government is proceeding with the 407 east environmental assessment study. It is under way and moving forward. The first phase of the study, the evaluation of transportation alternatives, has been completed, and it was presented to the public in May and June 2006. The recommended alternative confirmed the need for a new east-west transportation corridor, and that's from 407 to Highway 35/115.

The recommended transportation corridor has been carried to the next phase, the route planning. The second of four rounds of public consultations were held in November and December 2006, where the alternative routes were shown to the public. There were no adverse concerns raised by the public. The next round of public information is scheduled for 2007 in the late spring, and they are going to actually present the preferred route.

So the study will continue. It is under way. We are completing the public consultation—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister. Supplementary? The member for Whitby-Ajax.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby-Ajax): Minister, the fact of the matter is that your government refuses to make the eastward extension of the 407 a priority, and now the businesses and residents of Durham region are paying the price for your lack of action.

At the 2006 AGM of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce it was reported that "the negative economic and capital investment impact, to Ontario, of not proceeding to complete Highway 407 eastward ... is real. Major industrial and commercial organizations located east of Toronto have confirmed that the inadequate level of 400 series highways on the east side of the GTA severely affects their businesses." They indicate that the tourism and manufacturing sectors of the economy will suffer as well.

We heard just about a month ago that the Sobeys distribution centre located in my riding, in Whitby, which employs 750 people, is being downsized to build a new system in Vaughan. Also, this past summer, 1,000 jobs were lost at General Motors in Oshawa.

Minister, you know that enhancing the infrastructure to move goods and labour through the markets is vital for economic growth. Why won't you make the—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I'm pleased to respond. Possibly, if the previous government hadn't sold the 407, things might be a bit different. But having said that, we are proceeding. We are going through the public consultation. Yes, it does take some time. We've had to do the alternative routes. But to suggest that we have not invested in transportation in Durham—in the last three years we've put over \$217 million into Durham in transportation.

We are moving forward on the 407 corridor. It is a priority for this government. The EAs have been completed. The preferred and alternative routes have gone through their public consultation. The rest, the actual preferred route, will be presented in the spring, and then we will continue on. It is a priority for this government; we will continue.

There is no question that we have made a very significant contribution to the transportation system in Durham, not only with what we're proceeding with but with what we've actually already invested in that region.

WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): I have a non-partisan question for the Minister of Natural Resources, and fittingly the last question of this session. For the past 35 years, the Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary has nursed injured wildlife back to health for release to the wild.

In exceptional circumstances, wildlife cared for at the sanctuary cannot be entirely rehabilitated and released. One such animal is Lucky, a young doe and surrogate mother to 12 orphaned fawns. But luck is running out for Lucky in this holiday season, because two months ago your officials informed the sanctuary that Lucky and others, including a three-legged fox, have to be destroyed. Professional wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians strongly disagree.

Minister, will you assure Ontarians that Lucky and other threatened wildlife at the Aspen Valley sanctuary will not be destroyed?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Deer, deer, deer.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Order. The Minister of Natural Resources, the Premier will have to move; thank you.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I want it on the record that it was the Speaker who ordered the Premier to move, not the Minister of Natural Resources.

I appreciate the question from the member. As you know, we've had some other cases that have been in the news lately. The member knows that we really highly value the wildlife rehabilitation organizations in the province and the very important work they do. I know that they make every effort, in their professionalism, to heal and to repair the wounds and injuries so that wildlife can retain their position, back in nature where they belong. We certainly support that, so we'll continue to work with these organizations and with the member on this particular issue.

Mr. Tabuns: I appreciate the direction that the minister is going in and I'm just—

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: What direction?

Mr. Tabuns: The minister shouldn't undermine confidence in his statement.

I'm hoping that, given that he sees it's a good thing to work with these organizations and it's a good thing to protect the lives of animals that have been given rehabilitation, and given that sanctuaries found that wildlife that can't be released can play an important educational role with children and as surrogates, he will provide Aspen Valley with authorization, under section 40 of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, to retain Lucky and others for educational purposes. You have the authority. Will you use it?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: We have quite a few of these requests before us. Like I said on the other situation that the member from Nepean previously had brought up, we will take that into consideration. I appreciate the member's interest in this.

BIRTH OF MEMBER'S GRANDCHILD

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I know that persons in this House would like to know the good news that my daughter Erin, along with her husband, Scott, provided the first grandchild to our family yesterday. He's a little bit early, but he didn't want to miss Christmas. We're the proud grandparents of Trent Patrick Agnello.

1510

PETITIONS

PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have another petition to do with the Mary Lake dam, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the dam at Mary Lake has historically provided a pedestrian walkway for use by the community and visitors since the dam's construction; and

"Whereas the walkway provides a vital link and a tourist attraction for the community of Port Sydney; and

"Whereas restricting access to the walkway would result in pedestrian use of the roadway, where motor vehicle traffic poses a danger to pedestrians; and

"Whereas closure of the pedestrian walkway across the dam is inconsistent with other provincial government programs, including Ontario's action plan for healthy eating and active living and the Trails for Life program, both of which promote active lifestyles; and

"Whereas all ministries should strive to encourage and support healthy lifestyles;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Natural Resources continue to permit the use of the pedestrian walkway over Mary Lake dam indefinitely."

I support this petition.

MEMBERS' COMPENSATION

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have a petition that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty government's 31% pay hike to MPPs is out of touch with the reality that working families across this province are feeling;

"Whereas the McGuinty government promised open and transparent government and yet has gone ahead and broken another promise by covertly attempting to increase the pay of MPPs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To not implement this astronomical 31% increase and in future to employ a consultative process allowing Ontarians to provide their opinions and concerns with respect to the pay of the Premier, cabinet ministers and MPPs."

I am in agreement and would affix my signature thereto, and send it down with page Gloria.

ADULT LITERACY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly. It has to do with literacy initiatives in the province of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas investing in adult literacy initiatives will give more Ontarians the opportunity to upgrade their skills and gain the training they need to reach their full potential; and

"Whereas through these funding initiatives, Ontarians will have greater accessibility to post-secondary education and valuable apprenticeship programs that will put them on the right track to gaining the jobs in their field of choice; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government is providing new support for adult literacy by expanding academic upgrading services to help workers build stronger literacy and numeracy skills so they are able to perform at a

higher level, thereby enhancing our workforce and our economy; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government is investing \$6.2 billion more into post-secondary education and training by 2009-10;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the McGuinty government’s efforts in providing funding to adult literacy initiatives in order to both help Ontarians to meet their full potential as well as to strengthen Ontario’s economy.”

Since I agree with this petition, I’m delighted to put my name to it.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would just ask members to quiet down the private conversations.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly to end discrimination.

“Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

“Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;

“Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

“Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

“Whereas Ontario is the only Western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces except the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

“Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

“Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

“Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair and accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

“We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded.”

Because I fully support the principle behind this petition, I’m prepared to affix my signature in support and give it to page Mackenzie to deliver to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I want to present the last of the petitions that I’ve received from SEIU. I thank them for their work in this regard. It reads as follows:

“Whereas, in June 2003, Dalton McGuinty said that Ontario Liberals are committed to ensuring that nursing home residents receive more personal care each day and will reinstate minimum standards, and inspectors will be required to audit the staff-to-resident ratios; and

“Whereas Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman, in October 2004, said that the Ontario government will not set a specified number of care hours nursing home residents are to receive each day; and

“Whereas Ontario nursing home residents still receive the lowest number of care hours in the Western world; and

“Whereas studies have indicated nursing home residents should receive at least 4.1 hours of nursing care per day; and

“Whereas a coroner’s jury in April 2005 recommended the Ontario government establish a minimum number of care hours nursing home residents must receive each day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario immediately enact a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of nursing care for each nursing home resident per day.”

I agree with these petitioners. I’ve affixed my signature to this.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): This is a petition to do with transit in Scarborough and it’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It is signed by several people in Scarborough. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario in its last budget allocated in excess of \$2 billion for public transit expansion across Ontario;

“Whereas the majority of these funds are slated for subway expansion to York University up to the city of Vaughan;

“Whereas the city of Toronto has not yet acted on determining what it plans to do with the antiquated Scarborough LRT;

“Whereas the issue of resolving Scarborough’s LRT, along with a transit growth strategy for Scarborough, was not adequately addressed in the TTC’s latest transit growth strategy document;

"Whereas the current transit regime designed for Scarborough does not actively promote nor encourage increased ridership;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure that new provincial monies received by the TTC for transit upgrades and expansion go towards addressing the transit shortcomings in Scarborough."

I'm pleased to sign this petition—and I know many of my colleagues from Scarborough are as well—and to give a copy of this petition to page Or, who's with me today.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the proposed Long-Term Care Homes Act is extremely lengthy and complex and requires full and extensive parliamentary and public debate and committee hearings throughout the province; and

"Whereas the rigid, pervasive and detailed framework proposed is excessive and will stifle innovation and flexibility in the long-term-care sector; and

"Whereas the additional burden, red tape and punitive measures imposed by the proposed legislation will aggravate and exacerbate the chronic underfunding of the sector, to the detriment of residents of the homes; and

"Whereas the proposed legislation will have serious implications for the viability of the for-profit, and not-for-profit, charitable and municipal long-term-care sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We demand that the McGuinty government withdraw the proposed act, or remove the offending sections, and fulfill its commitment by a substantial increase in funding on a multi-year basis in the order of the promised \$6,000 per resident, per year."

As I am in agreement, I've affixed my signature and I'm happy to give it to Arianne.

1520

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to present on behalf of my seatmate, the member for Niagara Falls, who sends his greetings to everyone in the House. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry), that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease

are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

It's signed by more than 100,000 people from the Niagara Falls area. I'll autograph it and give it to page Simon to deliver for me, and Speaker, Merry Christmas to you.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislature to end discrimination:

"Whereas the Ontario government already fully funds 93% of faith-based schools in Ontario, but the remaining 7% receive no funding, solely because they are not Catholic;

"Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled in 1999 and again in 2005 that this arrangement is discriminatory and violates basic international human rights law that Ontario formally agreed to uphold;

"Whereas all three parties represented in the Legislature support Catholic separate school funding, as guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada, so that the only fair and viable solution to the discrimination is to extend funding to the small religious minorities that are currently excluded;

"Whereas the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that Ontario has the constitutional power to provide funding to non-Catholic faith-based schools;

"Whereas Ontario is the only Western democracy that fully funds faith-based schools of one religion to the total exclusion of all other religions, while all other provinces except the Atlantic provinces fund faith-based schools and have thriving public school systems;

"Whereas the cultural survival of the affected minority groups is at stake;

"Whereas faith-based schools produce responsible and productive citizens; and

"Whereas the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools in December 2004 submitted to the Minister of Education a detailed proposal for the funding of non-Catholic faith-based schools in a manner that is fair and accountable and protects and enhances the public interest;

"We call on the Ontario Legislature to pass legislation to provide equitable funding in respect of all faith-based schools in Ontario without religious discrimination and without any reduction in funding for public education, with accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded."

I support this petition, and I send it to the table with Colby. Merry Christmas, Colby.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your recognizing me, because I know this will be the last petition that I give in 2006, so thank you very much.

Applause.

Mr. Ruprecht: I don't know whether that means that there's agreement here.

This petition is to the Parliament of Ontario—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Can you do something about identity theft?

Mr. Ruprecht:—and specifically about government services, and it has to do with identity theft. It reads as follows:

“Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

“Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

“Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

“Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

“(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers.

“(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

“(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reasons.

“(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate.”

Since I agree with this petition, and I know you do too—I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your recognition—I'll sign this document.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to call orders for second and third reading of Pr bills concurrently and that the questions be put without debate or amendment, and that Ms. Horwath be permitted to move Bill Pr29 on behalf of Mr. Marchese.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent to call orders for second and third reading of Pr bills concurrently and that the questions be put without debate or amendment, and that Ms. Horwath be permitted to move Bill Pr29 on behalf of Mr. Marchese. Agreed? Agreed.

SHEENA'S PLACE ACT, 2006

Ms. Horwath, on behalf of Mr. Marchese, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr29, An Act respecting Sheena's Place.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Ms. Horwath, on behalf of Mr. Marchese, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr29, An Act respecting Sheena's Place.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

RED LEAVES RESORT
ASSOCIATION ACT, 2006

Mr. Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr30, An Act respecting Red Leaves Resort Association.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Miller moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr30, An Act respecting Red Leaves Resort Association.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

PERIMETER INSTITUTE ACT, 2006

Mrs. Witmer moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr31, An Act respecting the Perimeter Institute.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mrs. Witmer moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr31, An Act respecting the Perimeter Institute.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL
GOVERNANCE INNOVATION ACT, 2006

Mrs. Witmer moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr32, An Act respecting The Centre for International Governance Innovation.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mrs. Witmer moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr32, An Act respecting The Centre for International Governance Innovation.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it the resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006
LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

Mrs. Bountrogianni moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act / Projet de loi 173, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés et la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1531 to 1541.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne
Balkissoon, Bas
Barrett, Toby
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bountrogianni, Marie
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael

Gerretsen, John
Hardeman, Ernie
Hoy, Pat
Hudak, Tim
Jeffrey, Linda
Klees, Frank
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy

Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Runciman, Robert W.
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario

Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Chambers, Mary Anne V.
Chudleigh, Ted
Colle, Mike
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Di Cocco, Caroline
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Elliott, Christine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Martiniuk, Gerry
Matthews, Deborah
McGuinty, Dalton
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Miller, Norm
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Mossop, Jennifer F.
Munro, Julia
O'Toole, John
Peters, Steve
Peterson, Tim
Phillips, Gerry

Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sorbara, Gregory S.
Sterling, Norman W.
Takhar, Harinder S.
Tory, John
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John
Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

DiNovo, Cheri
Hampton, Howard
Horwath, Andrea

Kormos, Peter
Martel, Shelley
Prue, Michael

Tabuns, Peter

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 77; the nays are 7.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker: When a motion to adjourn the House carries before the usual 6 p.m. adjournment time, a scheduled adjournment debate—the late show—is automatically carried over to the next sessional day on which such debates are held. Therefore, the late show originally scheduled for today will be carried over to Tuesday, March 20, in the event of passage of the motion to adjourn.

Mr. Bradley has moved adjournment of the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock, Monday, March 19, 2007.

Merry Christmas. Happy new year. Season's greetings.

The House adjourned at 1545.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. James K. Bartleman

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown

Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Waterloo–Wellington	First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Premier Vice-Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Finances
Balkissoon, Bas (L)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services (Community Safety) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels (Sécurité communautaire)
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant	
Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L)	Sudbury	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L)	London West / London-Ouest	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Deputy government whip / whip adjoint du gouvernement
Bisson, Gilles (ND)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Chief New Democratic Party whip / whip en chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Bountrogianni, Hon. / L'hon. Marie (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L)	St. Catharines	Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, government House leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Brown, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	Speaker / Président
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Tourism / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Tourisme
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Attorney General / procureur général
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L)	Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	Deputy opposition whip / whip adjoint de l'opposition
Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Craiton, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services (Correctional and Emergency Services) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels (Services correctionnels et situations d'urgence)
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice-Président, Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for seniors / adjoint parlementaire au ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West–Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest–Mississauga	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government Services / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Di Cocco, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (L)	Sarnia–Lambton	Minister of Culture / ministre de la Culture
DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Municipal Affairs) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Affaires municipales)
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Ajax	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de l'Énergie
Fonseca, Peter (L)	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Gravelle, Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est	
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Erie–Lincoln	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and minister responsible for democratic renewal / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales et ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Klees, Frank (PC)	Oak Ridges	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and to the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce et au ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Environnement
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	Chief government whip / whip en chef du gouvernement
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
Marsales, Judy (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	
Martel, Shelley (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services and minister responsible for women's issues / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires et ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
McMeekin, Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Aldershot	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Éducation
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa–Orléans	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Transports
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	Chief opposition whip / whip en chef de l'opposition
Milloy, John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / adjointe parlementaire au ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)	Stoney Creek	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture and minister . responsible for francophone affairs / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Culture et ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Munro, Julia (PC)	York North / York-Nord	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	Deputy opposition whip / whip adjoint de l'opposition
Orazietti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Richesses naturelles et ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Parsons, Ernie (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services (Disabilities) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires (Personnes handicapées)
Patten, Richard (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Premier / adjoint parlementaire au premier ministre
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Peterson, Tim (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York / Beaches–York-Est	
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Racco, Mario G. (L)	Thornhill	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Travail
Rarnal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Rural Affairs) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Affaires rurales)

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House leader / leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph–Wellington	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de l'Éducation
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Victoria–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Housing) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Logement)
Smith, Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice- premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Lanark–Carleton	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)	Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford	Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tory, John (PC)	Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey	Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Agriculture and Food) / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Agriculture et Alimentation)
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Wilkinson, John (L)	Perth–Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Research and Innovation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Deputy opposition House leader / leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General / adjoint parlementaire au procureur général
Vacant	Burlington	
Vacant	Markham	
Vacant	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	

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Ces listes figurent dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et du premier lundi de chaque mois. Par contre, une liste des circonscriptions paraît si l'espace est disponible.

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No. 142

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Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 19 March 2007

Lundi 19 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Acting Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffière par intérim
Deborah Deller

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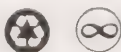
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 19 March 2007

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

INTRODUCTION OF MEMBERS FOR MARKHAM, BURLINGTON, AND YORK SOUTH–WESTON

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that the Acting Clerk has received from the Chief Election Officer and laid upon the table certificates of the by-elections in the electoral districts of Markham, Burlington and York South–Weston.

The Acting Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): This is a letter addressed to:

“Mrs. Deborah Deller
“Acting Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
“Room 104
“Legislative Building
“Queen’s Park
“Toronto, Ontario
“M7A 1A2
“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the tenth day of January, 2007, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Judi McIntyre, returning officer for the electoral district of Markham, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Markham in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Tony C. Wong who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Markham, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Markham on the eighth day of February, 2007, Michael Chan has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 16th day of February, 2007, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“John L. Hollins
“Chief Election Officer
“Toronto, March 8, 2007.”

The second letter is addressed to:

“Mrs. Deborah Deller
“Acting Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
“Room 104
“Legislative Building
“Queen’s Park
“Toronto, Ontario
“M7A 1A2
“Dear Mrs. Deller:

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 19 mars 2007

“A writ of election dated the tenth day of January, 2007, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Jean Schemmer, returning officer for the electoral district of Burlington, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of Burlington in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Cam Jackson who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of Burlington, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in Burlington on the eighth day of February, 2007, Joyce Savoline has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election dated the 16th day of February, 2007, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“John L. Hollins
“Chief Election Officer
“Toronto, March 8, 2007.”
The third letter is addressed to:

“Mrs. Deborah Deller
“Acting Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
“Room 104
“Legislative Building
“Queen’s Park
“Toronto, Ontario
“M7A 1A2
“Dear Mrs. Deller:

“A writ of election dated the tenth day of January, 2007, was issued by the Honourable Lieutenant Governor of the province of Ontario, and was addressed to Kenneth H. Paterson, returning officer for the electoral district of York South–Weston, for the election of a member to represent the said electoral district of York South–Weston in the Legislative Assembly of this province in the room of Joseph Cordiano who, since his election as representative of the said electoral district of York South–Weston, has resigned his seat. This is to certify that, a poll having been granted and held in York South–Weston on the eighth day of February, 2007, Paul Ferreira has been returned as duly elected as appears by the return of the said writ of election, dated the 16th day of February, 2007, which is now lodged of record in my office.

“John L. Hollins
“Chief Election Officer
“Toronto, March 8, 2007.”

Mr. Chan was escorted into the chamber by Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Bradley.

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Michael Chan, member-elect for the electoral district of Markham, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

Mrs. Savoline was escorted into the chamber by Mr. Tory and Mr. Runciman.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Joyce Savoline, member-elect for the electoral district of Burlington, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take her seat.

The Speaker: Let the honourable member take her seat.

Applause.

1340

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): Speaker, I have the honour to present to you and to the House Paul Ferreira, member-elect for the electoral district of York South–Weston, who has taken the oath and signed the roll and now claims the right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Let the honourable member take his seat.

Applause.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VIC PRIESTLY

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I rise today to pay tribute to a great Ontarian. In his hometown of Aurora, throughout York region and across this province, Vic Priestly is known as a man who has a head for business and a heart for people, his outstanding business success overshadowed only by his generous contributions to his community and to humanitarian causes that will continue to touch lives for generations to come.

Whether a voice of encouragement to a struggling business acquaintance, a guiding hand to a budding entrepreneur, a word of caution to an overly optimistic politician or a helping hand to the vulnerable, Vic Priestly moves in and out of these roles with determination, enthusiasm and grace.

Organizations that benefited from Vic's leadership over the years include the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, the Royal Canadian Legion and the York County Hospital Foundation. His leadership with the Rotary Club of Aurora earned him the prestigious Paul Harris Fellowship Award, and in 1999, Vic was named citizen of the year by the town of Aurora. Today, Community Living Newmarket/Aurora district is honouring Vic

Priestly for his lifetime of excellence in community service.

I invite all members of this Legislature to join with me in endorsing this most appropriate honour on a most deserving citizen of this province.

HATE CRIMES

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I regret to rise once again to address the issue of hate crimes in our communities. While Ontario has made great strides in protecting the equality and human rights of our citizens, occasionally we are confronted with a dark reminder that hatred still remains.

This time, it reared its ugly head in the form of offensive Nazi symbols scrawled on the Chabad Midtown Jewish Community Centre in downtown Toronto. Jewish groups are understandably outraged, as they should be; indeed, all Ontarians are outraged.

Fortunately, a suspect was apprehended at the scene, thanks in part to the vigilance of TTC bus driver Giovanni Hidalgo and the Toronto police.

If there is a bright light that can emerge from such a hateful incident, it is that the good citizens of Ontario who feel a duty to stand up and fight back, did. Ontario is a beacon of multiculturalism. Our diversity and acceptance of difference helps to define our identity. As Premier McGuinty has said, an attack on any one of us is an attack on all of us. As members of this House, we must stand together yet again and send the message that hate, in any form, against any group, against any person in Ontario, will not be tolerated.

TOBACCO GROWERS

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): Tobacco country is in full-blown crisis, and desperate farmers need a total exit plan immediately. We are all well aware of the proposal from the tobacco marketing board and Tobacco Farmers in Crisis. As well, Dalton McGuinty promised to be "an active participant in a federally led process to fund a long-term solution for the tobacco growing region."

These are Ontario farmers. If this farm crisis was in any other province, farmers would be taken under that province's wing, but not as yet in McGuinty's Ontario. A few weeks ago, the finance committee government members voted against a motion to fund the traditional 40% share of a federally led compensation package: another broken promise. Both Ottawa and Queen's Park have said \$1 billion is too rich. However, if this McGuinty government would contribute its traditional 60%-40% share, I'm confident the exit package would be affordable.

There are a few government MPPs who want to do the right thing for tobacco farmers. The rest could learn a lot from these members, because they understand that this crisis goes beyond polling. Thursday's 2007-08 budget has to be more favourable for all farmers than the past

three budgets. McGuinty government policy has put tobacco farmers out of business. Will you not help pay for a dignified exit?

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I rise on behalf of those who are residents of long-term-care facilities not only in the riding of Timmins–James Bay but across this province who have been waiting on this government for over three years to take action towards the promises they made in the last election. The Liberal government in the last election said they were going to fund an additional \$6,000 per resident for each resident in long-term-care facilities. To date, here we are on the eve of an election and yet we are not anywhere near meeting the commitment that the Liberals made in the last election. Then they talked about providing a minimum standard of care of 2.25 hours to every resident in long-term-care facilities across this province. Yet again, we are not anywhere near that.

I've got to say that each and every one of us here in this Legislature has had the chance to go into long-term-care facilities, no matter what side of the political aisle we come from, and we all see the same thing. We see staff working their hearts out, trying to do the best they can with as little money as they've got to provide services to those people in long-term-care facilities. We watch what happens to the residents in regard to the amount of attention they get when they are in need and they are not able to find staff people, not because staff people don't want to respond, but because staff have to respond to many calls and there's not enough money to fund the homes to the degree needed in order to provide the services that are required.

What is really sad is that when you go into the secure units and you look at those residents who are suffering from dementia, you often see situations where there's one staff person to watch the entire wing while other staff people are out basically doing other things within the facility.

This is unacceptable. This government has to act, because if we are not going to take care of seniors, then I've got to say that we're not doing a very good job of what government should be all about.

CIA BOUNCE BASKETBALL

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): I'm pleased to rise today to recognize a very special achievement by a constituent, Brampton elementary schoolteacher Mr. Michael George. He joined lifelong Brampton residents Tony McIntyre and Derek Boyce, who together formed CIA youth bounce basketball. CIA—which stands for “characteristics inspiring achievement”—bounce basketball is an elite basketball program. It was founded to provide a safe environment for youth to cultivate confidence, discipline and respect

through mentoring, workshops and excursions, as well as through teamwork.

This past month, as many still may recall, Mr. George, who teaches at Cardinal Newman Catholic school, won \$144,000 on a popular game show, and as promised then, he has given half to the organization and the kids who mean so much to him. That's a lot of money.

I cannot fully express my happiness and admiration for these role models and the selfless example they set for our community and our youth, and especially for the residents of Brampton West–Mississauga. For more information on their great work, please visit www.bouncebasketball.com. Mr. George is here in our gallery today, and I would appreciate it if we would welcome him to our Legislature.

1350

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): We have three days until the provincial budget is presented in this place. Based on the previous record of Premier McGuinty, the outlook is grim for Ontario taxpayers. It took from Confederation to 2003 to get Ontario government spending to \$68 billion a year in total. In true Liberal fashion, Dalton McGuinty plans to boost that spending to over \$90 billion in four years. That's a whopping \$22-billion, or 34%, increase in government spending. That is simply breathtaking.

We all remember that this time last year the McGuinty cabinet hastily rushed out some \$3 billion in last-minute March-madness spending that was heavily criticized by the Auditor General for the lack of controls or strings attached. Despite all of that spending, Ontario taxpayers must wonder where all the money has gone and what they've got to show for it. We don't see better education, we certainly don't see improved health care, nor do we see reduced taxes for seniors or working families in the province. Instead, we see the McGuinty Liberals increasing the debt by some \$13 billion and forecasting a \$4-billion increase this year.

Mr. Speaker, you know as well as I that money does not grow on trees. It comes from the pockets of hard-working voters across Ontario who want to see spending with a plan, with controls and with real results for Ontarians. In the immortal words of Roger Daltrey, taxpayers won't be fooled again by Dalton McGuinty.

HUMBER RIVER REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): In my riding of York West, Humber River Regional Hospital this year celebrates its 10th anniversary. For the past 10 years, and previously as York-Finch Hospital, Humber River Regional Hospital has been serving the larger community, reaching out to approximately 800,000 people. In York West, home to a strong multicultural community, Humber River Regional Hospital provides health care information in more than 50 languages.

February 2 of this year marked the occasion of our Minister of Health having announced that Humber River Regional Hospital has been designated as the province's first medical centre of excellence. Humber River Regional Hospital provides care to some 100,000 emergency visits each year and more than 300,000 ambulatory and diagnostic procedures annually. It provides a full range of medical and surgical services and is recognized as the regional centre for dialysis, level 2 women's health, child and adolescent mental health, and in the provision of cancer surgery and chemotherapy.

Humber River Regional Hospital has a very proud past and is looking toward an even more exciting future. Congratulations to the president, Rueben Devlin, his hard-working staff, physicians and volunteers, who total about 4,000 dedicated and committed individuals. Together, their tireless efforts have promoted Humber River Regional Hospital to the cutting edge of acute hospital care in Canada. Humber River Regional Hospital will celebrate not only 10 years but the beginning of a long and continuous level of service to the people of York West.

To Humber River Regional Hospital, happy 10th anniversary.

HOCKEYVILLE

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): The tension ran high in North Bay on Saturday night as the winner of Kraft Hockeyville 2007 was set to be announced during Hockey Night in Canada, with all of Canada finding out which of the five final communities would be voted the champion.

Ron McLean read the results of the vote, starting with Noelville in fifth place, and the final two communities, both from Ontario: Cornwall and North Bay. The tension could not have been higher as Gary Bettman announced that North Bay is Hockeyville.

This is one more example of what we in Nipissing can do when we put our minds to it. This was truly a grass-roots campaign, and a number of people worked tirelessly to make this happen. I want to congratulate Chris Dawson, the chair; Debbie, Heath and Devon Marson; Ryan Drouin; Paul Robillard; Rob Brownlee; Brad Gavan; Joey Rainer; Linda Turcotte; Trina St. Jacques; and Randy Edmonds. They encouraged all of us to vote early and vote often. We proudly wore our hockey jerseys to work on Thursday and encouraged everyone to get out and vote.

Not only does the city win bragging rights as Hockeyville, \$50,000 for arena upgrades, and a pre-season NHL exhibition game between the New York Islanders and the Atlanta Thrashers, but the city will also be featured in a national one-hour CBC Television special to air this fall.

Hockeyville officials noted that "North Bay's commitment to community and hockey underlies everything they do." The officials took notice of local initiatives like Tommy Hedican's Coach for Food program and the hosting of Hurricane Katrina victims at our local pond hockey tournament.

I want to congratulate everyone who was involved in this. It was a great community effort and everyone got out and voted.

I just want to remind everyone in this Legislature that in North Bay we are Hockeyville.

KOOLATRON INC.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): It's a very large pleasure to rise today to highlight the tremendous contribution being made to local infrastructure in my riding by Koolatron Inc.

With the help of a \$2.34-million investment from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, a \$26-million investment will be leveraged.

Koolatron is a fascinating business that is investing in the development of several new products, including a large mobile cooler and a cordless mosquito trap, using energy-efficient thermoelectric power designed by the shuttle program.

This investment will allow for the creation of new jobs and the retention of over 170 high-value jobs for workers in Brant, jobs that the people of Brant can count on into the future.

All of this acts as proof that the McGuinty government's ongoing commitment to local infrastructures, a stable energy supply, as well as research and innovation are key to the economic development of our province.

The investment made in Koolatron represents a win for my riding of Brant, the workers and their families and for the government.

Our government is making strategic investments that are helping manufacturers throughout the province with this specific program.

The summer season is quickly approaching, and if anyone has any plans to travel, I would strongly suggest that they visit www.koolatron.com, where they can read about and purchase several different types of portable travel coolers and warmers that are ideal for travel.

This will unlock investment in our province. We thank the McGuinty government so much for this investment.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Speaker: Ribbons today have been mailed from Epilepsy Ontario—their program that they want to make March their epilepsy awareness month. I seek unanimous consent in this House to wear the ribbons that have been mailed to each one of us. Lavender will now become the colour of epilepsy.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

VISITORS

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship): On a point of order, Mr.

Speaker: I would like to recognize Bill Laidlaw. He's the executive director of the MaRS Centre and the Canadian Biotechnology Education Resource Centre. I'd also like to recognize Faridah Saadat. She is the intern working with Bill Laidlaw at the MaRS Centre.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would draw members' attention to the members' west gallery. We have with us Mr. Elie Martel, who represented Sudbury East in the 29th to 33rd Parliaments. Welcome.

In the Speaker's gallery we have David Warner, the member for Scarborough–Ellesmere in the 30th, 31st, 33rd, and 35th Parliaments and the Speaker of the House in the 35th Parliament. Welcome.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I'd like all to join me in recognizing my new seatmate's husband, Ron Savoline, along with their children Robb, Becky, Natasha and Josh, and her cousins Philip and Courtney Patent, who have flown in from Arizona to see today's event.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham–Kent Essex): I beg leave to present a report on the pre-budget consultations 2007 from the standing committee on finance and economic affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Does the member have a brief statement?

Mr. Hoy: I thank the committee and all of the staff who worked on this particular report.

I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Shall the motion carry? Carried.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario's electoral system / Projet de loi 155, Loi prévoyant un référendum sur le système électoral de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1400 to 1405.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Balkissoon, Bas	Hardeman, Ernie	Qadri, Shafiq
Barrett, Toby	Hoy, Pat	Racco, Mario G.
Bartolucci, Rick	Hudak, Tim	Ramal, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Rinaldi, Lou
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Runciman, Robert W.
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Broten, Laurel C.	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce
Bryant, Michael	Marsales, Judy	Scott, Laurie
Cansfield, Donna H.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McMeekin, Ted	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	McNeely, Phil	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sterling, Norman W.
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Tascona, Joseph N.
Di Cocco, Caroline	O'Toole, John	Tory, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Oraziotti, David	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Watson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie	Wilkinson, John
Dunlop, Garfield	Patten, Richard	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	Yakabuski, John
Fonseca, Peter	Peterson, Tim	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Martel, Shelley
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Ferreira, Paul	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter

The Acting Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 78; the nays are 9.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on social policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Mr. Parsons from the standing committee on social policy presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption:

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 140, An Act respecting long-term care homes / Projet de loi 140, Loi concernant les foyers de soins de longue durée.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1410 to 1415.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnett, Ted	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Arthurs, Wayne	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Balkissoon, Bas	Hardeman, Ernie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Barrett, Toby	Hoy, Pat	Racco, Mario G.
Bartolucci, Rick	Hudak, Tim	Ramal, Khalil
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Klees, Frank	Rinaldi, Lou
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Runciman, Robert W.
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Broten, Laurel C.	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Brownell, Jim	MacLeod, Lisa	Savoline, Joyce
Bryant, Michael	Marsales, Judy	Scott, Laurie
Cansfield, Donna H.	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McMeekin, Ted	Smitherman, George
Chan, Michael	McNeely, Phil	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Crozier, Bruce	Meilleur, Madeleine	Sterling, Norman W.
Delaney, Bob	Miller, Norm	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Tascona, Joseph N.
Di Cocco, Caroline	O'Toole, John	Tory, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Oraziotti, David	Van Bommel, Maria
Duguid, Brad	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Watson, Jim
Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie	Wilkinson, John
Dunlop, Garfield	Patten, Richard	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	Yakubuski, John
Fonseca, Peter	Peterson, Tim	Zimmer, David

resolved and resolved now. They have been outstanding for as many as 10 years. Even if some of these issues would be resolved on an interim basis, the committee feels that that should be done.

I move adjournment of this debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Mr. Berardinetti from the standing committee on justice policy presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption:

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 103, An Act to establish an Independent Police Review Director and create a new public complaints process by amending the Police Services Act / Projet de loi 103, Loi visant à créer le poste de directeur indépendant d'examen de la police et à créer une nouvelle procédure de traitement des plaintes du public en modifiant la Loi sur les services policiers.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

VISITORS

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of the new member from Markham, the Minister of Revenue, Michael Chan. In the northwest corner, we have the family of the member: his wife, his two sons, his mother-in-law, his sister and, of course, the president of the Markham riding. Welcome to this House.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the Clerk received the reports on intended appointments dated February 26 and March 1, 2007, of the standing committee on government agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the reports are deemed to be adopted by the House.

SPECIAL REPORT, OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that during the adjournment, the following report was tabled on February 27, 2007: a report from the Ombudsman concerning the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Martel, Shelley
DiNovo, Cheri	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Ferreira, Paul	Marchese, Rosario	Tabuns, Peter

The Acting Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 78; the nays are 9.

The Speaker: The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 20, 2006, I beg leave to present a report on the driver and vehicle private issuing network from the standing committee on public accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Does the member have a brief statement?

Mr. Sterling: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the public accounts committee reviews the auditor's report and does it section by section on a weekly basis. This report comes from the Auditor General's 2005 annual report.

The driver and vehicle private issuing network provides a great service for the government of Ontario and does it very cost-efficiently.

1420

There have been a number of issues with regard to the compensation for the people who do this work. There have been a number of issues with regard to the oversight of these different offices. I think there was a general feeling of the committee that these issues should be

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
DAY ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR
LE JOUR MARTIN LUTHER KING

Mr. Klees moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to proclaim Martin Luther King Jr. Day / Projet de loi 181, Loi proclamant le Jour Martin Luther King.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): As the preamble to my private member's bill states, more than 100 countries around the globe honour the person and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in support of the movement inspired by his life and death to promote interracial harmony based on the principles of human rights, equality and freedom.

In the words of Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, the president of the Ontario Black History Society, "Martin Luther King has come to be a symbol of freedom, social justice and equality in the world. And when we recognize him, we also recognize the efforts of countless others who have contributed to our current level of awareness of these important issues."

I would ask members to welcome Dr. Sadlier, who is here to observe the tabling of this legislation in the west members' gallery.

Dr. King himself was inspired by the example of a great abolitionist and member of the British Parliament, William Wilberforce, who spent his political career fighting slavery and who died just one month before the anti-slavery act of 1807 was promulgated by the British Parliament on March 25 of that year. That act did end the transatlantic slave trade but did not end enslavement of Africans.

A contemporary of William Wilberforce who likewise took inspiration from him was Ontario's first Lieutenant Governor, John Graves Simcoe. In 1793, when this very House came into existence at Newark, and at its first sitting, John Simcoe ensured that the first bills on the order of business to be tabled were those that attacked the pernicious institution of slavery in Upper Canada. That was almost 15 years before the British act of 1807.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LE MOIS
DE L'HISTOIRE DES NOIRS

Mr. Balkissoon moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 182, An Act to name February in each year Black History Month / Projet de loi 182, Loi visant à désigner

le mois de février de chaque année comme Mois de l'histoire des Noirs.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): This bill, entitled An Act to name February in each year Black History Month, is about celebrating the many contributions of African-Canadians, both past and present, every year in the month of February. It signifies this government's commitment to promoting and upholding Ontario's diversity.

Ontario has been enriched through the achievements made by African-Canadians. I am pleased to propose that we formally acknowledge February in each year as Black History Month in Ontario.

MEMBERS FOR LEEDS–GRENVILLE AND DAVENPORT

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: If I may, I would like to draw to the attention of the House that on March 19, 1981, the member for Leeds–Grenville, Mr. Runciman, and the member for Davenport, Mr. Ruprecht, were elected to this House. I think we should extend congratulations to them.

Applause.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: While I appreciate the applause—and so does Mr. Runciman, I'm sure—I want the honourable members to know that when I was still in public school, I listened to the rousing speeches by the member from St. Catharines, who has been here much longer than I have.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr. Kormos and Mr. Ferreira exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Kormos assumes ballot item 78 and Mr. Ferreira assumes ballot item 74; Mr. Balkissoon and Mr. Duguid exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Balkissoon assumes ballot item 72 and Mr. Duguid assumes ballot item 73; and that, pursuant to

standing order 96(g), notice be waived for ballot items 71, 72, 73 and 74.

The Speaker: Shall the motion carry? Carried.

1430

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FAMILY SUPPORT SOUTIEN FAMILIAL

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for franco-phone affairs): Today I am proud to tell the House about an important McGuinty government initiative that is helping families and children get the support that they deserve. On February 19, our government launched goodparentspay.com, a new website to help track down defaulting support payers who refuse to live up to their family responsibilities.

Nous affichons sur le site lesbonsparentspayent.com, la photo de mauvais payeurs dont le lieu de résidence est inconnu, ainsi que des renseignements à leur sujet. Le site Web lesbonsparentspayent.com connaît un succès retentissant. En fonction depuis seulement quatre semaines, plus de 16,8 millions d'accès au site ont été enregistrés.

We have received more than 200 tips from the public about the location of support payers not living up to their family responsibilities. Most important, I am proud to tell this House today that we have already located five defaulting payers. We've added five new profiles to the site so that Ontarians can continue to help us make sure that children get the support they deserve.

Most parents are responsible. These good parents pay their court-ordered child support. But there are some irresponsible parents out there. To them our message is simple: We will find you, and we will make sure your children get the support they deserve.

Le site Web lesbonsparentspayent.com est la plus récente des mesures prises par le gouvernement McGuinty pour aider les familles et les enfants.

J'aimerais rappeler quelques autres réalisations du Bureau des obligations familiales : Plus de 330 \$ millions ont été recouvrés grâce à l'initiative d'information des agences d'évaluation du crédit. Près de 400 000 appels additionnels ont été traités par la nouvelle unité du service à la clientèle du bureau depuis février 2004, ce qui représente une hausse de 35 % du nombre d'appels traités par le bureau. Plus de 238 000 nouveaux numéros d'identification personnels, NIP, ont été délivrés à des clientes et clients pour leur permettre d'accéder, 24 heures sur 24, sept jours sur sept, à des renseignements sur leur cas au moyen d'un système automatisé.

Our government believes that children should not suffer because a parent refuses to live up to her or his financial responsibilities. We will use every tool at our

disposal to find those who don't pay. Thanks to goodparentspay.com, parents not living up to their family responsibilities are getting the message and children are getting the support they so rightly deserve.

I want to thank all those who have gone on the site and are helping us to identify and locate these parents.

EDUCATION FUNDING SUBVENTIONS DESTINÉES À L'ÉDUCATION

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Over the past four years, we've seen our government's commitment and investments in education paying off for our students.

Au cours des quatre dernières années, nous avons constaté que l'engagement de notre gouvernement envers l'éducation et ses investissements dans ce secteur donnent des résultats au profit de nos élèves.

Scores on various provincial tests are up between five and 15 percentage points. Graduation rates have increased 5% over the past two years, and class sizes are smaller, with almost all primary students in classes of 23 or fewer.

And it's not over. Students will benefit from another year of significant education investments through the help of new resources and a funding formula that reflects the changing needs of our students. Education funding will increase by \$781 million, to an unprecedented total of \$18.3 billion in 2007-08. Province-wide funding per pupil will rise by 5.1% to more than \$9,400. That means an additional \$2,000 for each student in Ontario since our government came to office.

This funding supports three new components to the funding formula to help boards meet their operating costs and to boost student achievement.

First, the program enhancement grant will support arts, music, physical education, outdoor education and other activities that provide students with a well-rounded educational experience.

Second, the First Nations, Metis and Inuit education supplement will provide enhanced ongoing supports for aboriginal students.

Third, the supported schools allocation will ensure that schools in small communities with low or declining enrolments stay viable.

Our government's new investment in 2007-08 also includes support for 1,900 new teachers, a 3% salary increase negotiated in the labour framework, increased funding for special education, increased funding to recognize the rising costs of transportation and utilities, and additional support for French-language boards.

We are listening to our education partners. We are listening to ensure that the way we deliver funding responds to the changing needs of students and schools.

Since 2003, our government has made 10 significant changes to the funding formula. We've supported more teachers to create smaller class sizes and more secondary

courses. We've addressed the teacher salary funding gap. We're renewing our schools with a \$4-billion investment to repair and rebuild them, and we're providing school-based funding so that small schools and schools with declining enrolment get the stable funding they need.

We will continue to work with school boards and our other partners in education to ensure our students' best interests are looked after and that parents can feel confident in the publicly funded education system.

Through our investments, commitments and partnerships, we're creating peace and stability and giving our students more opportunities to reach their full potential.

Grâce à nos investissements, à nos engagements et à nos partenariats, nous instaurons de la paix et de la stabilité et nous donnons à nos élèves plus de possibilités de réaliser leur plein potentiel. Merci.

DORIS ANDERSON

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): On March 2, days before International Women's Day, our province lost a champion and a trailblazer of women's rights: Doris Anderson. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask my colleagues to join me in remembering an icon of women's equality.

Grâce à ses efforts, les femmes en Ontario et au Canada ont davantage de choix et d'opportunités. M^{me} Anderson a tracé la voie vers la pleine égalité des sexes pendant plus de 50 ans. Elle estimait que toutes les femmes devraient être libres de faire leurs propres choix et de vivre sans craindre de devenir victimes de violence. Elle a agi pour que ses convictions fassent partie de notre expérience quotidienne.

During her tenure as editor of *Chatelaine* magazine, Ms. Anderson raised women's consciousness about topics that had a direct impact on their lives: topics like the wage gap; inequality of divorce laws; women's health issues.

At a time when there were very few women in politics, Doris Anderson asked what was then considered to be an impertinent question: Why aren't there more women in politics?

1440

Ms. Anderson pushed for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

She used her position as chair of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women to lobby for strong wording on women's equality in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Thanks to Ms. Anderson and the support of a generation of Canadian women, we now have wording that enshrines women's equality in the charter.

But she didn't stop there. Ms. Anderson, in the last decade and a half of her life, campaigned vigorously for proportional representation in the electoral system. She believed that it would encourage more women to run and have a better chance at being elected.

Looking back at all of her accomplishments, we owe a lot to Doris Anderson.

Of course, we know there is still more work to do. Our numbers are still too few in politics. Women are still living with the threat of violence in their own homes, and some are not able to access economic opportunities. But our government, along with our community partners, is doing its part to honour this inspirational woman by redoubling our efforts to address these issues.

Our government is investing more than \$82 million over four years to keep women and children safe through our domestic violence action plan. The plan is working to prevent violence against women through better community supports, a strengthened justice system response, public education strategies, and increased access to French services. And we are creating economic opportunities by funding training programs in the skilled trades and information technology areas.

Our government will also safeguard those rights that women have fought so hard for.

True equality means that women can live free from the fear of violence in their own homes and have economic opportunities. Our government will honour Doris Anderson's memory by doing just that: improving women's lives across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

FAMILY SUPPORT

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I'm glad to have this chance to reply to the Minister of Community and Social Services on behalf of our party. I know that the member for York North, who is an outstanding advocate for improving the well-being of Ontario's children and families, would want to be here to respond to this statement, but I understand that she is attending a funeral this afternoon. So, in responding on her behalf, I'm expressing my own personal views.

My wife and I have been blessed with three children, and they are the centre of our lives. As a father, I believe that I have certain moral obligations to my children, one of which is ensuring that all of their essential material needs are met. I believe that every father has this moral obligation. This obligation continues even in the event of a marital split.

In many cases, Ontario court orders are intended to ensure that the costs of raising children are shared by both parents. Unfortunately, as we know, too many children still do without because one parent is unwilling or unable to make their payments to meet their children's needs.

Every member of this House knows that the Family Responsibility Office is a bureaucracy which has huge problems. Rarely a day goes by that my constituency office doesn't receive a complaint about FRO. Whether FRO is poorly administered or is under-resourced or its processes need to be simplified or new leadership needs to be appointed, the government has been remiss in

tackling the fundamental problems at FRO. The Ombudsman has said as much, and I agree.

With over \$1.3 billion in support arrears uncollected, tens of thousands of children go without the basic necessities that most of us take for granted. How do these families pay for healthy food, new shoes, additional school expenses and extras like minor sports and other recreational activities, let alone save up for post-secondary education? Many of them can't.

Will this new website help? I sincerely hope so. However, when we looked at it in my office a few minutes ago, it appeared that there were only 18 so-called deadbeat dads pictured on the website: hardly something worth boasting about in this House.

The minister claims to have located five deadbeat dads, but has the money that they owe yet found its way to their children? Apparently not.

Collecting all of that money for all of those children and families in Ontario will take a lot more than a website. It will take an overhaul, strong leadership, compassion for families and a good business sense.

The McGuinty Liberal government had its chance and wasted the last three and a half years. These children need a change of government.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): The minister's statement today is nothing short of an indictment of the government's mismanagement of public dollars: that after three and a half years and an additional \$3.5 billion, the best this government can do is to take credit for improved test scores on standardized tests that every member of the Liberal caucus voted against.

The reality is that after \$3.5 billion and three and a half years, , neither of the Dalton McGuinty cornerstone promises of caps on class sizes and fixing the funding formula has been kept. In fact, where the cap has been implemented, school board administrators and teachers are telling us about the incredible problems they're having in those schools. The fact is that the funding formula has not been fixed, and the commitments that this government made while on the campaign trail to ensure that the foundational funding for education would be dealt with are a miserable failure on the part of this government. Three and a half billion dollars later and we have school boards in deficit, we have classrooms in trouble, and the stakeholders who are the most true supporters of this government are abandoning them, accusing them, and exposing the shell game that they've been playing for the last three and a half years.

DORIS ANDERSON

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I'm pleased to rise and respond on behalf of John Tory and the PC caucus in honour of the late Doris Anderson. It is also fitting that we celebrate the life of Doris Anderson in

light of the 30th anniversary of International Women's Day, which was March 8.

As a journalist and an activist for women's rights, Doris Anderson spent much of her life clearing a path for the advancement of women in Canada and in Ontario. We are fortunate to join today in celebrating the life of such a progressive woman in Canada as we welcome my colleague the member from Burlington, Joyce Savoline, as part of the John Tory team. Ms. Savoline's election to this Legislature has allowed us to reach a historically high proportion of women in the Ontario Legislature, at 25%. I am very proud to be a member of a party that, under Premier Bill Davis, appointed the Honourable Margaret Birch as Ontario's first woman cabinet minister in 1972.

To Doris Anderson, equality simply made sense. It was and is a basic question of human rights and fairness. In order to help our goals of equality and inclusion, it is imperative that we recognize the work of pioneers such as Doris Anderson.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): In response to the Minister of Community and Social Services: another day, another government website. What people need in this province is a lot more than that. What the spouses and children need is action, not another website that does virtually nothing. By your own admission, you have found five defaulters. By your own admission, not one of those defaulters has yet paid a single nickel into the system.

What you have announced today is nothing. What we need is streamlined rules where those who want to pay more are allowed to do so without going back to court. What we need is a computer system that actually works. What we need are some workers who are given the muscle and the money and the number of people they need to actually do their job. We need speedy legal action.

You have stated in your statement that children suffer when parents won't pay. Children also suffer when your government won't pay. They also suffer when you claw back their money. You should have a website to report yourselves for what you have done these past three years.

DORIS ANDERSON

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): In the meagre amount of time we've been allotted to honour the iconic symbol of the Canadian women's movement whom we lost March 2, I want to pay tribute to the legacy of Doris Anderson, who championed the rights of women in a trailblazing fashion in this province. Every step Doris took in her life was a break of new ground. She put herself through university in 1945. She began working as a journalist when barriers to women working outside the home were still very much in place. When she moved to *Chatelaine* magazine, Doris rose quickly

through the ranks. As the editor for 20 years, she made Chatelaine the pre-eminent voice for women's issues and shaped generations with the feminist belief that women can do anything, and she encouraged women to do just that.

Doris lived her beliefs. As an activist, a champion, an insightful writer, an author, and a dogged campaigner for raising the status of women, Doris constantly worked for equality and against social injustice. Even as her life was nearing an end at age 85, Doris was lobbying fiercely to stop the Harper Conservatives' raid on status-of-women funding and the closure of local offices.

You might be interested to know that Equal Voice has found a powerful way to honour Doris and her life's work by establishing the Doris Anderson fund, which will be dedicated to getting more women elected to political office. This goal was Doris's driving passion. Equal Voice has planned a memorial tea kickoff fund-raising event for Sunday, April 15, and we hope that everyone who is watching today can attend. I can think of no better way to recognize Doris Anderson, a modern pioneer for women's financial, social and political equality, than with a fund that encompasses the principles she lived by and cherished.

Doris Anderson will long be remembered and will be a source of inspiration and strength as we continue to struggle for equal pay; for universal, non-profit child care; for affordable housing; and here, in Ontario, an end to the clawback of the national child benefit.

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EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Here we have yet another multi-million-dollar announcement on education funding. The problem is that this government is high on announceables and low on payables; this government is all about announceables and not about deliverables. Frankly, New Democrats don't believe that this money will ever be spent. These announcements give the government all the political currency they want, and they feel that once they've gotten the headlines, there is no urgency about actually keeping the promises.

The government announced \$4 billion in school repairs in 2004. To date, less than 10% of that money has actually been spent, but the government continues to take credit for the announced amount. Buildings are still crumbling, students still go to class in portables, parents still have to fundraise for basic school essentials like teachers' office supplies and textbooks with chocolate bars and skip-a-thons. They're raising money unlike ever before. It's \$40 million today and rising under the Liberals.

Children cannot learn English as a second language because there are no teachers to teach them. We cannot improve transportation funding simply by encouraging boards to work together to improve services for students and to reduce costs. Children are still waiting in line for special education support because government has

capped special education spending. Parents have already heard that special ed teachers will be funded; now they will hear it again.

This government treats the announcement of programs and the implementation of programs as the same thing. This money will not deal with the backlog of needs that has built up over the last three years, but the worst part of it is that the money won't flow at all, because we all know that McGuinty money flows like molasses in March.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. Could the Premier please tell the House how much taxpayers' money the Dalton McGuinty government has spent to date fighting various lawsuits related to autism?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm sure that the leader of the official opposition would be more interested in learning what we're doing for children who are affected by autism. I'll be pleased to better inform him in that regard.

First of all, we've ended the entirely unfair discrimination that had been put in place by the Conservative government, who were cutting kids off from assistance when they turned the age of six. We have eliminated that unfair age cut-off. We have more than doubled our level of investment in supports for children affected by autism to more than \$115 million this year. We now have more therapists than ever before. We've created a new college program to train therapists; 110 new therapists have been hired, and there are 200 graduating in the next year.

Mr. Tory: The fact is that in this area, as in so many others, the Premier has utterly failed to keep the promises he made so forcefully in 2003. Maybe the Premier will actually answer the question if I put it this way: We've heard estimates of the amount of money that he has spent on lawyers fighting parents of children with autism and lawyers fighting to keep information secret about how public money is being spent on those same lawyers. We've heard estimates on how much he's spending to keep that information secret. We've heard estimates ranging from \$2 million to \$10 million. That's money that is not available to help these families who have these challenges in front of them. Maybe he could help the poor old taxpayers whose money this is by telling them: Is the number closer to \$2 million that you're spending on lawyers to fight these parent with children with autism or is it closer to \$10 million? Then maybe you might explain how your idea of addressing autism to begin with comes from fighting parents in court and fighting MPPs in court who are trying to help them. Maybe you could explain that.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, so that the leader of the official opposition is reminded of this, this is litigation that was started under the Conservative government, just so we're clear about where we're going on this, because he seems to have forgotten that.

Now, what else have we done specifically to assist families into which a child has been born who has been affected by autism? More children than ever before are getting service. In fact, more than 1,100 children are now receiving IBI treatment this year. That's a 105% increase since 2004. We've reduced wait times for assessments; there has been a 68% reduction in the waiting list for assessments since 2004. And there is more early years support than ever before. We're training 1,600 early childhood education and child care workers to work with children who are affected by autism.

Again, I want to remind my honourable friend that it was on his watch, under his government's watch, that they instituted this particular—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: The fact is that the promises the Premier himself made—he could have and should have shut that litigation down a long time ago.

I attended a fundraiser a couple of weeks ago. It was put on by friends of Eugene and Jee Lee and their four-year-old son, Parker. They get from the government about half of what it costs to provide autism therapy for Parker; the fundraiser was to pay the rest. Yet even with the help of the fundraiser that they brought their friends out to on a Saturday night, they have their house up for sale because they have to sell it, and they're thinking of moving to Alberta, where they can get more help.

In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, millions of dollars are spent on lawyers to fight these parents in court, and millions of dollars are now being spent to fight MPPs in court who are just trying to get information and help these families and these kids. It's no wonder Dalton McGuinty's government has increased spending by \$20 billion, with few results. It's this type of thing that the money is going towards.

My question is this: Will the Premier please tell us how many millions of taxpayers' dollars he has spent on these lawyers to fight these families that have children with autism, and when is he going to stop—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I want to again take this opportunity to remind my honourable friend that the court case was started because of their unfair, discriminatory cut-off. That's why that court case was instituted in the first instance. I note as well that my honourable friend is now also saying he's prepared to provide additional support should he earn the privilege of serving in government, but again, that is restricted to children under the age of six. He would continue that discrimination.

Something else that we have done: For the first time ever, we're providing support in our schools. As of September of this year, under a new initiative, we'll be serving 7,000 school-age students in the classroom. To

that end, we are now training 5,000 teaching assistants to work with children over the age of six with autism in the classroom. We've also hired 170 autism consultants—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): The bottom line is, you haven't come close, not even close, to fulfilling your own promises.

A question to the Premier: Last week we had a report in the *Globe and Mail* that the McGuinty Liberals were looking at signing a contract with the Don Mills Surgical Unit for the purposes of performing 1,500 knee replacement operations. This was supported by a quote from Ministry of Health spokesperson A.G. Klei—one of the 77 people, by the way, who work in the communications branch alone of the Ministry of Health, according to the government phone book. The following day, the Minister of Health said that your government would “never support” such a proposal.

My question for the Premier is this: Does he support the Minister of Health's out-of-hand dismissal of this proposal, which would be paid for entirely within the public health care system with OHIP cards and would result in removing 1,500 people from the knee replacement wait-list in the process? Do you support the out-of-hand dismissal of this proposal to get these people off the list and out of pain and suffering?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): First of all, I want to take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Health and all those individuals working so hard within our public health care system who have realized so many gains when it comes to getting wait times down in the province of Ontario.

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This is yet more evidence that the leader of the official opposition is more than ready to give up on public health care in Ontario when it comes to bringing about more innovation and getting our wait times down. The public health care that he is today implicitly criticizing is a system through which we have already brought wait times down for knee replacements by 30.2%, which means we've brought wait times down by 133 days.

No, we are not prepared to give up on public health care, we're not prepared to give up on the gains we've made within public health care, nor are we prepared to give up on the gains we have yet to make within public health care.

Mr. Tory: What you are prepared to do is give up on exploring any publicly funded alternatives at all that would get people out of pain and suffering and get them the surgery they need. The fact of the matter is that the government's own website, Dalton McGuinty's own website, reports that, province-wide, the wait time for knee replacements is 307 days. That's 125 days—more than four months longer—than the benchmark your government set in December 2005. In Stratford, Ontario,

people are waiting 525 days for a knee replacement. In Ottawa, your hometown, they're waiting 641 days. In Kingston, they're waiting 785 days. Are you satisfied with that set of circumstances?

Why won't you explore a publicly funded alternative that will allow these people to get out of their pain and suffering and get in and get the surgery done, paid for with their OHIP cards within the publicly funded system? It's no statement of lack of confidence in the public health care system at all. It's a statement of confidence in the patients and getting them the surgery they need and restoring confidence in the system.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Once again, the leader of the official opposition is seeking to have it both ways. He tells us, on the one hand, that he's not, in effect, attacking public health care, but he is not prepared to acknowledge that they've made substantial gains when it comes to getting wait times down. On the other hand, he says that the only way for us to make these kinds of gains is to go through the private health care system. Well, we disagree with that.

It's also interesting to hear the member opposite use our benchmarks, which that government refused to put in place in the first instance. He's now consulting our website to gain access to information which that government refused to make available in the first instance. But what is more important, and more galling, is the fact that he refuses to acknowledge that public health care in the province of Ontario is making great strides. We are getting wait times down, and we're doing that by bringing about innovation within the publicly funded, publicly delivered health care system. Why won't he join us to work harder within public health care?

Mr. Tory: What the Premier doesn't understand—and that's why he's spent \$20 billion more of taxpayers' money and has little to show for it—is that it doesn't matter if you set benchmarks and then you don't meet them: 525 days in Stratford for a knee replacement; 641 days in Ottawa for a knee replacement; 785 days in Kingston. You are not meeting these benchmarks; you are way off meeting these benchmarks.

Let's look at a different question, then. If it's not okay under the publicly funded health care system to have knee replacements done by the Don Mills Surgical Unit, why is it okay for the Dalton McGuinty government to do cataract operations and arthroscopic knee surgery, paid for through the public system, at the very same place? Why is that okay and these poor people who are suffering waiting for knee replacements can't have their surgery done? Why is it a big point of principle for the knee replacement people and not for the cataracts and everything else? Explain that.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: We're going to continue to make progress, to make inroads and to make huge strides forward on behalf of the people of Ontario by pursuing those avenues where we are guaranteed success. That's what we've done to date and that's what we will continue to do.

I think another question that weighs heavily on the minds of the people of Ontario is: If this gentleman

opposite is truly determined to get wait times down and to bring about substantive, measurable improvement within the public health care system—something that his government before refused to do—how is it going to help Ontarians if the member opposite takes \$2.5 billion of funding out of public health care? How is that going to help the people of Ontario who look to public health care when it comes to relying on the quality of delivery services that they have come to rely on under this government?

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier: Last year, the banks broke all records by posting \$19 billion in profits, and oil companies racked up \$21 billion in profits. But at this time of unprecedented corporate profits and prosperity, several studies tell us that the average family is working longer and harder while seeing fewer of the economic benefits. New Democrats believe that today's working families deserve a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. My question is this: Does the Premier share that view? And if he does, why has the Premier refused to raise the minimum wage to \$10 an hour today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I want to welcome the NDP to this debate. I want to remind them that our government has raised the minimum wage four times now. We've raised it 17% in our first four years. The leader of the NDP will in fact know that I have stated now—it's a matter of record—that the issue for us is not whether we get to \$10 an hour; it's what's the best way to get there for us to do that. He knows all of that.

What he refuses to acknowledge, however, is that he voted against an additional 15,000 child care spaces for Ontario children, he voted against insulin pumps for children affected by diabetes, he voted against 120,000 grants for university and college students, and he voted against our raises to social assistance and disability support. So on the one hand, he tells us that he's prepared to stand up for vulnerable families, but on the other hand, his record in this Legislature speaks to the contrary.

Mr. Hampton: I think the Premier struggles to avoid answering the question.

We know that people working for minimum wage are living below the poverty line. Your answer just now says that you might consider \$10 an hour sometime in the future. But to live, to have a living wage, these workers need \$10 an hour today, not in 2012, not in 2011. Premier, you're very good at preaching restraint to low-paid workers. Can you tell those low-paid workers why they aren't worth \$10 an hour today when you were so quick to raise your own pay by \$40,000 a year?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I note that in the NDP campaign platform, their commitment was to get to \$8 an hour, and now that we have gotten there, of course, they say that they've been in favour of \$10 an hour all along.

Again, let's describe some of those items that go beyond the minimum wage—which, we admit, is an

important issue, and we'll have much more to say about that shortly. When it comes to children, for example, we have now free vaccines in place, saving a family \$600 per child. We're now offering newborn screening; we've gone from two tests to 29. We were the worst and now we're first in Canada. We have 84,000 more children receiving nutrition support. As I mentioned a few moments ago, we've also doubled funding for autism in the province of Ontario. Yes, we have moved on the minimum wage, we will continue to move on the minimum wage, but we're also doing many things beyond that.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, here is the difference between your position and the New Democrat position: We said \$8 an hour in 2003, not \$8 an hour in 2007. And it should be \$10 an hour now, not \$10 an hour in 2012.

Last week we saw how tough you were prepared to be with corporate executives. Tom Parkinson took advantage of the people of Ontario, and you rewarded him with \$5 million in punishment pay. Thank God he didn't rip off the people of Ontario for any more or you would have given him more punishment pay. Premier, how do you justify your \$5 million in punishment pay for disgraced Tom Parkinson while you say to minimum wage workers that they're not worth \$10 an hour today?

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Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think it's important to understand what else we're doing, apart from the upcoming budget, to help the plight of the needy in the province of Ontario. We've increased social assistance and disability support twice now. We've ended the clawback of the national child benefit on a go-forward basis. A single parent with two children on social assistance now receives the equivalent of a 15.7% increase in supports. We've flowed through the entire \$1,200 federal child care credit. We've extended health and dental coverage when leaving assistance for a new job. We've restored the nutritional allowance for pregnant women, and we are allowing those who are working part-time to keep more of their income.

Now my NDP friends opposite are quick to dismiss all of these and say these have no impact whatsoever. We beg to differ. We have moved forward on the minimum wage. We will continue to do that, but we will also continue to move forward in so many other areas as well.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: The Premier talks about what else his government has done. His government continues to claw back \$250 million a year from the lowest-income children in this province in federal money that goes to those children—another thing you should be, according to yourself, proud of, Premier.

But there's a reason why working families aren't sharing in Ontario's corporate prosperity. Over the last four years, the McGuinty government's energy and economic policies have cost Ontario 140,000 manufacturing

and forest sector jobs. Working families are losing their paycheques, their benefits, their pensions; in some cases, whole communities are suffering.

Premier, you held a special, extended session of the Legislature to increase your own pay by \$40,000 a year, yet you refused to recall the Legislature to deal with this loss of manufacturing jobs. I ask you: What message does that send to hard-working families across Ontario about your government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I think the leader of the NDP will have to find a way to grow comfortable with the fact that he stands in here and asks these kinds of questions and yet he has accepted that pay and he has taken that pay. That's something he'll have to find a way to deal with.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): As they all have.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: As I believe they all have, each and every one of them.

We're pleased to be in a position to work with all Ontario communities. We understand that the economy is being challenged in certain sectors, but overall I think it's important to acknowledge that the economy continues to grow. There are 327,000 net new jobs over the course of the past three years plus. We've put in place a number of support strategies, whether to support the auto sector, the manufacturing sector, the agri-food sector, the forest sector or the TV and film sector, all of which are bearing fruit at this particular time. We will continue to work with all sectors, all Ontario communities, to ensure that they transition themselves to a more competitive, value-added economy.

Mr. Hampton: Actually, I haven't pocketed the pay increase, as you have. I've given it away to community organizations and charities that desperately need the money under the McGuinty government.

Premier, I've met with laid-off Hamilton steelworkers, and I've met—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Government House leader, I won't warn you again. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, I have met with laid-off steelworkers in Hamilton, laid-off auto workers in Windsor, Hershey workers in Smiths Falls and workers in paper mills across the north. I've met with workers who are struggling because they've lost their jobs, and they all say one thing: They know the McGuinty government is out of touch and the McGuinty government is showing no leadership. These workers all agree that Ontario needs a jobs commissioner to fight to reposition these jobs before they're lost.

Premier, these workers saw you take real action to raise your own pay by \$40,000 a year. When are they going to see real action to deal with the loss of their jobs?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP of course likes to pretend that somehow he is the only conscience in this Legislature and he's the only one who cares for families that are affected by job losses. I can tell you that many of us on this side of the House have also grappled to find ways to better serve communities that are affected by job losses.

I have more recently been involved with the job losses in Smiths Falls; I've been talking with the mayor there. I've been on the phone with the president and CEO of Hershey's. The Minister of Economic Development and Trade has just returned from a trip to the US to see what we might do, working with Hershey's, to restore some strength to that particular plant. Just recently, I've had the opportunity to speak with some of the union members and management for a plant in Sault Ste. Marie. I've also worked with Mike Gravelle to help him in a particular case of a plant that was affected by a fire in Nipigon.

We will continue to work with all our communities and all our workers to do what we can as a government to—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, your government is very good at saying, "We feel your pain." Workers across Ontario hear that from your government all the time. These same workers saw your government take real action to raise your own pay. You extended the session of the Legislature by one week to ram through that legislation. Now these workers are asking when they are going to see real action from your government.

Let me give you one specific example. You mentioned Thunder Bay. Thunder Bay just lost another 500 jobs at the Abitibi mill and the Bowater mill. The issue across the north is this: The north of Ontario produces the lowest-cost electricity in the world through hydro dams, but it's McGuinty government policy that says they have to pay seven cents a kilowatt hour for that lowest-cost electricity in the world. That is killing jobs at paper mill after paper mill. They're asking you, will you take real action, since the power dam is located in some cases 100 yards from the mill—

The Speaker: Order. The question has been asked. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: When you land \$7 billion worth of new investment in the auto sector, the leader of the NDP may dismiss that and say it's not real action, but on this side of the House we have a different perspective. We think it's real action that has created or protected 7,000 new jobs. We've put \$500 million into our advanced manufacturing strategy. So far, we have announced seven projects costing us \$350 million in investments and we've landed 2,700 new or protected jobs. In the agri-food sector, we've put in \$910 million to help farmers and support our ethanol program, which will create thousands and thousands of jobs. In the forestry sector, there's over \$1 billion in our strategy to work through this time of global competition and difficult pricing. In the TV and film sector, we've increased our tax credits and we've invested in training Ontarians to work in the film industry.

The member opposite may dismiss that, but we on this side of the House think that all those things and all those investments constitute real action, producing or protecting real jobs.

SMITHS FALLS ECONOMY

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): My question is to the Premier. As the Premier knows, the people of Smiths Falls were rocked last month by the announcement of Hershey closing their plant sometime in 2008 or 2009. This, together with the accelerated closure of Rideau Regional Centre, will mean that more than 1,500 people will lose their jobs in a community of 9,200. You can imagine the effect on not only those people who have lost their jobs directly, but the many people who have lost their jobs indirectly who supply to these major employers.

I appreciate the work that you have done, Mr. Premier, and that some of your ministers have done on this file. Our leader, John Tory, and I met with the mayor and the Hershey employees and are urging Hershey to stay there in some form into the future. But if this doesn't work, what is your plan for Smiths Falls' future?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

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Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): I think it's important to note that we have been working with the town of Smiths Falls, in particular the mayor and the leadership in this town, and we have brought the very best from my ministry and colleague ministries, all who have a part to play in the future of this town, and we believe that Smiths Falls does have a bright future. We will make sure that we work with them so that they do have a very bright future. Let me say that first.

Second, let me say also that we are impressed with the leadership of Smiths Falls. They are prepared to reach out and work with us to put together a plan, because if plan B is that that plant will close, we need to go to what is next for Smiths Falls and what part we can play in all of that. That is the conversation that we're engaging in with them. We have the A team, which is working directly with this town, meeting on a regular basis. I want to tell you that we believe that these talks are very fruitful and that we will develop a very good action plan for the future of Smiths Falls.

Mr. Sterling: After the announcement of the accelerated closure of Rideau Regional Centre, the mayor and I and many others tried to work with this government to find some answers to replace those jobs, those over 800 public sector jobs. Little has been forthcoming from the government on that issue.

Later today, I'm going to introduce some petitions in the Legislature to ask you, the government, to delay the closing of Rideau Regional Centre and to give the final

okay to the redevelopment of the Smiths Falls hospital. These people in Smiths Falls need a ray of hope for their future. This community is already suffering from a shortage of doctors, and a new hospital will help them attract not only the physicians but new investment to the community. Premier, will you commit to delaying the closure of Rideau Regional Centre and immediately starting the redevelopment of this hospital, which is ready to go to tender now?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think it's clear to the people who are in Smiths Falls and whom we've been working with these last many years, ever since the announcement of the final closure of the Rideau Regional Centre: That plan is moving ahead. We do want to work with this community, and we have told this community that. We have developed a very good rapport with the people, who are drawing up their lists of exactly where they want to go. We believe that the people at the table have to be local leadership, and they are there. We're working with them now, going across our ministries, to see how we can be helpful. The Ontario Realty Corp. is working diligently, in terms of releasing the site, to see what can happen on that site in the future. We believe that this community, through the benefit of the rural economic development fund, through my colleague at OMAFRA—they have made monies available over the past couple of years to draw up their plans around tourism and what they can bring to the region. We're working with this community hand in hand.

I spent two hours with the leadership at Hershey in Pennsylvania on Friday. They made it very clear what their future is as a company. We're—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): I'm honoured to rise in this House for my maiden question to the Premier. Premier, I've been instructed by the voters of York South–Weston to send you a loud and clear message: The people of York South–Weston do not want your privately run, publicly subsidized Blue 22 air-rail link. Premier, the people of York South–Weston want to know: If you found the time to give yourself a \$40,000 pay raise, when will you find the time to stop the Blue 22 dead in its tracks?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm going to refer the question to the Minister of the Environment, but if I may, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the member opposite, to welcome him to this Legislature and to offer him my very best and sincerest wishes as he assumes his new responsibilities on behalf of his constituents.

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I'm pleased to have a chance to clarify for the new member the process that is before the Ministry of the Environment with respect to the terms of reference. As

I've been saying since I received the terms of reference in January, I share many of the concerns that have been raised by the community, and I very much value the input that they are giving to this very important environmental assessment process.

So let me assure you that I will be making a decision with respect to the terms of reference, and I will be doing so once my concerns have been satisfied. I've asked MOE to work closely and consult with GO Transit and the various proponents to ensure that if a project should go forward and a terms of reference should be crafted, the right decision is made for the community and for the environment.

Mr. Ferreira: This is very typical. The Premier passes the buck, but he takes the big bucks.

Premier, my constituents confirmed how important this issue is to the environment, the safety of their kids and the economic survival of local businesses. Your government acknowledged this in the by-election and clearly echoed my sentiments that the communities along the rail corridor will not benefit from nor do they want the Blue 22 air-rail link.

A month ago I wrote your Minister of Transportation, in my first act after being elected, to urgently address the implications for the community along the line. I have yet to get a response.

Premier, I repeat: Will you listen to the community and stop your plans for the privately run, publicly subsidized Blue 22 train?

Hon. Ms. Broten: Let me assure the member that I have been very actively engaged on this file. I have stood on the platform at the Weston GO train and talked to your community, standing alongside Laura Albanese. I have heard from Ms. Albanese on a number of occasions with respect to this issue. At the platform, I had an opportunity to hear directly and to feel first-hand the concerns that the community had about their safety, about a high-speed train going by. Those reflect many of the concerns that have come forward to the Ministry of the Environment, and all of that is what is taken into account in the context of the creation of the terms of reference of an environmental assessment that will examine all of these issues. It's the proper process to take place. All of those things will come forward, and when terms of reference are made in terms of a decision, the right decision will be made for the environment and for the community. That's my commitment.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a question today for the Minister of Health. It's been well documented that the cuts by the third party to medical school spaces in the early 1990s resulted in a doctor shortage in this province. These initial cuts, coupled with years of inaction on the part of the previous government, have compounded the problem. This lack of health human resources is often cited as one of the barriers to shortening wait times for surgical procedures in Ontario.

This past weekend, you announced a brand new initiative to counter the shortage of anaesthesiologists in Ontario. One of these teams will be established in Oakville at Halton Healthcare Services, in my riding. Minister, will you tell the House how these teams will provide better access to surgical procedures for my constituents and all Ontarians?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As we have sought, through the wait times strategy, to dramatically enhance our surgical capacity, one of the shortcomings that we've run into is the shortage, indeed, of anaesthesiologists. Accordingly, we've been working with health care providers to create anaesthesia care teams made up of anaesthesiologists and two new health care roles: anaesthesia assistants and nurse practitioner-anaesthesia. These two new positions will support the anaesthesiologists. This gives them the capacity, working together as a team, to enhance the number of people they can support, thereby enhancing the surgical capacities.

It's an example of the innovations which are occurring inside the context of our publicly funded health care system. We believe that this is one of the really, really important breakthroughs that enables us to continue to enhance our surgical platform in the province of Ontario, thereby reducing wait times even further for the people of this province.

Mr. Flynn: These teams sound like they're a progressive move towards addressing the wait times issue. But what Ontario citizens and Oakville citizens want to ensure is that safety is also a number one priority. What kind of training will these new health care providers receive, both in Oakville and throughout Ontario, in the hospitals that they serve? And are we the first jurisdiction to actually introduce these roles?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: This is an innovation that has been applied in other parts of the world, indeed, in the United States and in Europe. Our model is a more collaborative model.

From the training standpoint, we engaged the Michener Institute, which is a specialized training institute for people taking up professions in medical sciences. We've provided \$1.35 million to support Ontario's first anaesthesia assistant certificate program. There are recent graduates and others who are currently in training.

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We've gone one step further. Because of the necessity of having nurses and medicine working well together to provide these supports, we've engaged the University of Toronto and asked them to bring together their faculties of nursing and medicine to be able to further support the adoption of this collaborative team approach to health care, designed to reduce wait times for Ontarians.

CLASS SIZE

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the Premier: Premier, just a few weeks ago your Minister of Education

boasted that your 2003 commitment to cap class sizes would in fact be kept. Today, we have reports from school boards across the province telling us that, given the limitations of school facilities, the short list of staff availability they have, it's just going to be impossible to meet your cap commitment. Will you admit today that your promise for a hard cap was wrong in the first place and, second, that it is an absolute failure?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): What has happened in the province of Ontario since we started investing in primary class size reduction is that we've got 65% of classes in this province in the primary grades at 20 students or fewer. We've got over 90% of classes at 23 students or fewer. What's happening is that primary class sizes have substantially been reduced from the time that the previous government was in office. What some boards have said to us—and I want to acknowledge my PA Liz Sandals, who has been talking to boards through this budget process, through this GSN process—was, “Do you know what? We're not going to quite get there. We're not going to be able to build as much as you have given us money to build. So we need a little bit of flexibility.” And what we said is that we're on target. If there are some boards that need a bit of flexibility, we'll work with them to give them some extra time.

Mr. Klees: So, Premier, your Minister of Education has in fact admitted that your cap promise has been a failure: 65% is far short of the commitment that you made.

Now, for those where in fact the caps have gone in place, you are wrecking havoc with the education system. Let me read to you from a 15-year teacher. She says that absolute capping is creating damaging structural problems in our education system—split classes. Teachers, principals, administrators around this province are telling you that your hard cap policy is a failure. You're creating problems within the system. Will you admit it and will you return to a policy of flexibility so that communities can properly plan within their school system? Will you do that?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I just want to quote from one of the member opposite's constituents. Jennifer Branch, who teaches a primary class at Moraine Hills Public School in Richmond Hill, says, “Having a smaller number, it just allows you the time to sit and really focus with them and give them as much attention and time as they need.” The people in this province who know that primary class size reduction works are the kids in those classrooms. They are the people who benefit from the class size reduction. If the member opposite took the time to go into an elementary school and talk to some primary teachers, he would know that primary class size reduction is working. We are on target.

Some boards have said to us, “We need a bit of flexibility,” because there is so much money in the

system to build capital they don't have time to spend it. They need some extra time. We're willing to give them that flexibility, because that's a reasonable response to a request from the sector. That is not something the member opposite understands, but it is something that we—

Mr. Klees: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like a late show. The minister didn't understand—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. I would remind members that the standing orders are quite clear about how you apply to have a late show, and it doesn't involve a statement during question period.

New question.

NANTICOKE GENERATING STATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): My question is for the Premier. Last week PollutionWatch confirmed again that Nanticoke is the number one greenhouse gas polluter in Ontario. Two weeks ago, the federal government pledged over \$500 million from its ecoTrust fund to Ontario to fight climate change. You were at the press conference; so was I. You're taking the money—that's a good thing—but you're still planning to keep Nanticoke running. Will you designate that ecoTrust fund to demand response, energy efficiency and cogeneration so that we can shut down Nanticoke as soon as possible?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Energy.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): I'm proud that this government has a policy to close coal plants, and I'm proud that, unlike the member opposite's party—the member opposite's leader goes to northern Ontario and says, "Keep the coal plants open." When he comes to southern Ontario, he says, "Close the coal plants."

We have reduced emissions from coal plants by 32% in the first two and a half years. We have closed a coal plant; we have laid out a plan to get the rest. We're going to continue down that path, and we will close the coal plants. We just wish your leader and your party would be consistent throughout the province in their views on closing coal. Don't go up north and say, "Keep them open," and come down south and say, "Close them."

This government is going to close the coal plants to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure a cleaner, greener environmental footprint in the energy sector.

Mr. Tabuns: As good at giving direct answers as shutting down coal plants, I have to say.

Anyway, as the minister well knows, reducing demand is the quickest way to shut down coal. He also knows that any credible plan to combat global warming, to combat climate change, has to have shutting down the Nanticoke plant as its highest priority. You know that this number one polluter has to be closed. You promised in 2003 that it would be closed in 2007. It's 2007; you broke that promise. Will you invest this money to cut demand in

Ontario so that Nanticoke can be shut down, or is it going to run indefinitely while you continue to say that someday you're going to shut it down?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Between 2003 and 2006, a 32% reduction in emissions from coal plants, including CO₂: 29% on CO₂, 44% on SO₂ and 46% on NO_x. What I would like the member to do is ask his leader why he said in Atikokan that the Atikokan coal plant doesn't create an air pollution problem and doesn't create a global warming problem. Yes, it does; sorry.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I know what he's trying to do; he's trying to have it both ways. He's trying to say up north that you can keep coal plants firing and down south that you can close them.

We believe firmly and unequivocally—and many other governments are joining us now—that coal must be closed. It must be closed in a timely, responsible fashion ensuring electricity reliability. Tell your leader to get with it, to quit saying one thing up north and another thing down—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

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AGRICULTURAL LABOUR POLICY

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham–Kent Essex): My question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, this year Canadian Agricultural Safety Week is being observed from March 14 to 20. This is a week where farmers are reminded that occupational health and safety is everyone's responsibility.

According to the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, 115 people are killed and another 1,500 are seriously injured by farm-related incidents each year. We know that our government is committed to safe farms. Our government put in place a regulation making the Occupational Health and Safety Act apply to farm operations, which came into effect in June 2006. As a result, paid farm workers, both domestic and foreign, now have the same basic health and safety rights as other Ontario workers employed in provincially regulated workplaces. Minister, can you update the House and my constituents on the impact of this important change both for the farm workers and for the overall farm community?

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I want to thank the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex for his question. I want to thank the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Farm Safety Association for spreading this important message, because it is important.

You need to recognize that the health and safety of all workers is of utmost importance to this ministry, and farmers are no exception. I'm proud that we were able to move forward. Two previous governments did not move forward. They left an exemption in place for agriculture in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. We didn't

believe that was right. We worked very closely with the Labour Issues Coordinating Committee. We worked closely between the Minister of Labour and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and those farmers on the ground to make sure that those protections of the Occupational Health and Safety Act applied to farm workers in this province.

We also recognized as we went forward that we had to have properly trained inspectors who understood the specific challenges within agriculture. That's why we have 14 dedicated inspectors who have received specific training. We've also moved forward with community information sessions. We're there to protect Ontario farmers.

Mr. Hoy: That's very positive.

Farmers grow our food and they contribute to our economic success. Our government recognizes the important role of agriculture and how it plays in our economy. No one in this House underestimates the importance of agriculture's farm sector. We could not survive without it. I can tell you from experience that farmers work long hours, sometimes in difficult and hazardous conditions. So I'm pleased to hear that the farm community have accepted the responsibilities under the act and are actively working to make their operations safe. Minister, can you please tell us what your inspectors found when they visited farm operations and what changes might be planned for the future?

Hon. Mr. Peters: I thank the member again for the question. This is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, and they have a great theme: "Protect your moving parts!" We think that is extremely important. We've taken a very proactive approach to this. We've conducted over 50 investigations. But tragically, two of those investigations involved farm fatalities. We investigated 29 critical or serious injuries. Yes, we recognize that farming can be a dangerous occupation. That's why we moved forward. No other government moved forward better protecting our farmers. We felt that that was extremely important.

As well, we've moved forward with orders. We've issued over 100 orders that have been written. I'm pleased to say that each one of those 100 orders that has been written has been voluntarily complied with, because our farm employees recognize that it's incumbent on them to be serious about workplace health and safety.

Again, we're going to continue to work closely with the Farm Safety Association, because outreach is extremely important. We need to make sure that we educate our farmers and our farm employers. We're going to see that that happens. We are getting results. We are better protected—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Minister, I know you have family in Oshawa and I realize that you know Oshawa is doing fairly well, but doing well in Oshawa is very

dependent on all its supportive infrastructure. I must say that our community was shocked and outraged at several aspects of you and your ministry. To our knowledge, for the first time in the province of Ontario you and your ministry have specifically stated which programs our local health care provider, Lakeridge Health, is to cut. Normally, you just say there is a reduction and then the health care provider decides where the cuts are going to be. But you have directed them. That amount is \$8 million.

Minister, these cuts are affecting vulnerable patients in areas such as children's mental health services, addiction services and crisis intervention services. Local individuals are getting involved, such that tomorrow night Paul Taylor is holding a town hall meeting to address these very issues. Minister, why have you and your ministry directed Lakeridge Health to cut \$8 million from specific programs, such as \$1.6 million at Pinewood treatment centre?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): If the honourable member's community expressed outrage at the fact that they just got a \$7-million budget increase, then imagine how outraged they must have been when his party, when he was a member here, cut Lakeridge's budget in-year by \$6.4 million and when they closed the Whitby hospital. That must have been cause for a lot of outrage. How does the community feel in a circumstance where your leader proposes a further \$2.5-billion cut to health care? The budget at Lakeridge Health this year is \$35.9 million greater than when we came to office as a government.

There are community-based mental health services being provided by the budget of Lakeridge Health. We have obligated the community hospital and the local health integration network to move forward in a fashion that sees those community-based services delivered in the community with no disruption to the individuals in the community. I will be pleased to work with the member more closely on this if that is what is required to address the misinformation.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary? The member for Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Minister, you're quite aware that you are at the head of the pack here cutting \$8 million from Lakeridge Health in the riding of Durham, Oshawa and Whitby-Ajax. There is a community meeting tomorrow night. It is important that you understand that this is a community with multi-site hospitals serving urban and rural settings, as well as a rapid-growth area as defined by the recent report from Stats Canada. But quite frankly, at a real level, Minister, these are vulnerable people, whether young or old. These are mental health services. They are being victimized under your watch. You can talk about the past. Under your charge, we've seen health tax increases and less access to services.

Minister, what are you going to do to protect not just the Bowmanville site and the Port Perry site but the

Whitby site as well as the Oshawa site? We need a commitment from you to address the shortfall of \$8 million that affects services to children and vulnerable people. What are you going to do to help the people at Lakeridge?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member in his question said, "You can talk about the past," and so, in part, I will. For 12 years in this province, community-based mental health services did not see one penny of increase. For every year that that party brought in a budget in the province of Ontario, community-based mental health services were left on their own. They closed the Whitby site of their hospital and they reduced in real terms the funding for Lakeridge Health by \$6.4 million.

In contrast, we've increased the budget at Lakeridge Health. This year it is \$35.9 million more than when our government came to office. There is a regional cancer centre under construction. I give the honourable member this very clear assurance with respect to community-based mental health services that are currently being provided by the hospital: We will work with the LHIN and the hospital to ensure that these services are continued with no disruption whatsoever to patients.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Premier. Last summer, charges in the Gilbank double homicide case were dropped amidst allegations of leaks one week before preliminary hearings were scheduled to begin. The Hamilton police chief has said that an OPP investigation into the botched case clears his department of any responsibility for leaks whatsoever. Your Attorney General has tried to sweep this case under the rug. Will you lift the cloud of suspicion around this trial and make the OPP report public?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): I think it first has to be said that obviously the death of Lynn and Fred Gilbank was a terrible and a brutal tragedy that affected your community. I've met with family members, met with their children. Obviously, we want to do everything we can to support those family members during this particularly difficult time.

The member mentioned an allegation of a leak. I just want to make it very clear that there was certainly no leak from the Ministry of the Attorney General. The Deputy Attorney General has confirmed this; the chief prosecutor has confirmed this. We had a discussion with your chief of police, who indicated very directly that he had absolutely no evidence or information about a leak from the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The matter is subject to an ongoing investigation. As such, I certainly don't want to say anything, and I know the member won't want to say anything, to interfere with that investigation, but I'm happy to address any other questions she has in her supplementary.

Ms. Horwath: The problem is that nobody has explained to the citizens of Hamilton why the case was dropped and whether in fact leaks from the provincial government contributed; that's part of the problem. The government has a record, unfortunately, of hiding inconvenient truths. Last week, the Attorney General was willing to take the honourable member for Nickel Belt to court to prevent her from learning the truth about autism-related cases.

When are you actually going to deal with the culture of secrecy that your government and your Attorney General have in fact made worse and finally create a culture of openness in government that you so long ago promised?

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Hon. Mr. Bryant: Again, the matter is subject to an ongoing investigation, and I know that the member would not want to do anything, either in this House or outside of this House, that in any way would derail or interfere with that investigation. Certainly I don't want to either.

It is in the hands of the police right now. The police are doing their work. Chief Mullan has indicated that the investigation continues. Obviously, if there's a role to play for the Ministry of the Attorney General to provide them with support, we will do that. In the meantime I personally, and officials in our ministry, have met with the family members and have endeavoured to do our best to explain in a fashion that at the same time does not compromise the ongoing investigation, and we will continue to do that as the investigation is ongoing.

ACCESSIBILITÉ POUR LES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Ma question s'adresse à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires. En décembre dernier, l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU a adopté la première convention conçue spécialement pour protéger les droits des personnes handicapées. La convention a pour objet de promouvoir, protéger et assurer la pleine et égale jouissance des droits de plus de 600 millions de personnes qui présentent des incapacités physiques, mentales, intellectuelles ou sensorielles durables. Quoique l'ONU demande aux pays de signer la convention et d'adopter des lois protégeant ces gens, quelle est la position de notre province face à cette convention de l'ONU?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Je voudrais remercier le député de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell pour sa question. Cette convention de l'ONU sur les droits humains est la première du 21^e siècle, et j'espère qu'elle démarquera une amélioration considérable du traitement des personnes handicapées.

Ainsi, je suis heureuse de vous dire que l'Ontario appuie sans équivoque la signature par le Canada de la

Convention internationale sur les droits des personnes handicapées. En fait, le gouvernement McGuinty a adopté plusieurs politiques ayant le but de rendre l'Ontario totalement accessible aux personnes handicapées d'ici 2025. Nous souhaitons réaliser l'accessibilité pour les Ontariens et Ontariennes ayant un handicap en ce qui concerne les biens, les services, les installations, le logement, l'emploi, les bâtiments, les constructions et les locaux d'ici le 1^{er} janvier 2005, en concevant, mettant en œuvre et appliquant des normes d'accessibilité.

M. Lalonde: Je sais que je ne suis pas le seul dans cette Chambre à me réjouir par rapport à votre appui quant à la signature de la Convention internationale sur les droits des personnes handicapées pour le Canada. L'Ontario est le chef de file dans ce domaine grâce à la Loi de 2005 sur l'accessibilité pour les personnes handicapées de l'Ontario, qui a pour but, comme vous l'avez souligné, de rendre l'Ontario totalement accessible aux personnes handicapées d'ici 2025. Cependant, pourquoi faut-il jusqu'à 2025 pour mettre en œuvre la Loi de 2005 sur l'accessibilité pour les personnes handicapées de l'Ontario?

L'hon. M^{me} Meilleur: La date de 2025 est l'aboutissement et non le point de départ. Les personnes ayant un handicap doivent pouvoir se déplacer d'un endroit à l'autre, magasiner, aller à l'école, rendre visite à leur médecin ou trouver un emploi sans faire face à des obstacles que les personnes qui n'ont aucun handicap n'ont pas à surmonter. En dépit de nos souhaits les plus chers, une telle tâche ne peut être accomplie du jour au lendemain.

D'ailleurs, d'autres pays sont parvenus à la même conclusion. À titre d'exemple, l'Australie s'est fixé des étapes de cinq ans, échelonnées sur 30 ans, pour éliminer les obstacles à l'accessibilité dans le domaine des transports. Les États-Unis, quant à eux, ont établi dans le domaine des transports des objectifs qui s'échelonnent sur une période allant jusqu'à 30 ans.

En collaborant tous—personnes, collectivités, secteurs public et privé—nous serons en mesure d'éliminer et de prévenir dès maintenant les obstacles à l'accessibilité. Nous obtiendrons de véritables résultats en plusieurs étapes, avec des jalons au moins tous les cinq ans.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As you know, standing order 97(d) requires the ministry to respond to written questions within 24 sitting days of their having been placed on the order paper. I want to draw your attention to question 235, standing in my name: The response was due November 13, 2006, and has not been received. And question 309, standing in the name of the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock: A response was due on December 6, 2006, and has not been received. I further draw your attention to questions 242 through 247, standing in the name of the member for Oak Ridges: Responses were due by November 2, 2006.

Interim answers have been received, but we've not seen the full responses. The minister indicated on the responses that "we are currently preparing a response to your question which will be available shortly." That was almost five months ago, and I submit that "shortly" has long passed. I ask you, Speaker, to direct the government to respond to these questions today and release information that rightfully belongs in the public domain.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): This, of course, is a point of order, and I would remind the ministries affected—the Ministry of the Attorney General in response to Mr. Runciman's question and the Ministry of the Environment in response to Ms. Scott's—that their answers are overdue and that they need to deal with that immediately.

PETITIONS

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mrs. Joyce Savoline (Burlington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas the lung association's women and COPD national report 2006 reveals that more than 425,000 Canadian women have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease ... and more than 4,300 will die of the disease this year; and

"Whereas the women and COPD national report indicates that since 2000, female mortality due to COPD has risen at double the rate of breast cancer;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a call to action for early diagnosis and optimized management of COPD to reduce illness and suffering;

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the Ontario Lung Association's COPD advisory panel report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on the prevention and management of COPD in Ontario; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario endorse a comprehensive strategy to address COPD in this province."

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I have a petition here. I was going to read it with Rosario Marchese's glasses, but I figure I'd better take my good friend Mr. Yakabuski's. They're much more becoming of my physique. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs to its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provision in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario of Ontario to: increase long-term-care operating funds by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I affix my name to that petition on behalf of the residents of Extendicare.

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PEACE OFFICERS' MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for an Ontario Peace Officers' Memorial Day and a memorial monument on Queen's Park (Bill 131):

"Whereas Ontario peace officers have performed significant and heroic duties to protect the public for over 130 years; and

"Whereas Ontario peace officers have been murdered, killed, or died in the line of duty; and

"Whereas federal peace officers have also been murdered, killed, or died in the line of duty in Ontario; and

"Whereas Bill 131"—written by MPP Dave Levac—"would establish a Peace Officers' Memorial Day and a permanent Ontario peace officers' monument on Queen's Park; and

"Whereas Ontario peace officers are recognized nationally, along with police, at the police and peace officers' memorial on Parliament Hill in Ottawa; and

"Whereas eight (8) other provinces have police and peace officers' memorials;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 131 which would create a Peace Officers' Memorial Day in Ontario and a peace officers' memorial monument on Queen's Park where fallen officers' families, other peace officers and the

public can remember peace officers who have given their lives in the performance of their duties in Ontario."

I sign my petition and hand it to Alyssa, our page.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): It being 4 o'clock, I am required by standing order 30(b) to now call orders of the day, but before I do, I beg to inform the House that on December 21, 2006, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor was pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 173, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act, the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 and the Executive Council Act / *Projet de loi 173, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative, la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés et la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.*

Bill Pr29, An Act respecting Sheena's Place.

Bill Pr30, An Act respecting Red Leaves Resort Association.

Bill Pr31, An Act respecting the Perimeter Institute.

Bill Pr32, An Act respecting The Centre for International Governance Innovation.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR L'INTERVENANT PROVINCIAL EN FAVEUR DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES

Mrs. Chambers moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth / *Projet de loi 165, Loi visant à créer la charge d'intervenant provincial en faveur des enfants et des jeunes et à y pourvoir.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mrs. Chambers has moved second reading of Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Minister.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Last November, our government took a very significant step forward to provide better protection for Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth. We did this because we are determined to ensure that these children and youth will always have the ability to be heard by government and by the people of this province.

Today our government is pleased to be moving forward on the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, which would, if passed, make the province's child and youth advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. This legislation, if passed, will better protect the interests of children and youth by ensuring that no government, current or future, would be able to suppress the voice of the advocate.

The child advocate provides a voice to be heard that might otherwise be ignored. This government believes that when it comes to giving vulnerable children a voice, there can be no room for interference, political or otherwise. Ontario's children deserve no less.

We promised to bring forward a law that would have an independent child and youth advocate report to the Legislative Assembly. We said the appointment would take place through an all-party legislative committee, and we said we would make the advocate as independent as the Auditor General and the Ombudsman. If passed, this legislation would meet that commitment.

The child advocate represents a range of children and youth who are seeking or receiving services. Those services could be in the youth justice system, in the children's mental health or complex/special-needs systems, in the child protection and well-being system, or in provincial and demonstration schools for the deaf and blind. The advocate's office also reviews cases that involve complaints about the treatment or care of a child or youth in a program funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Each year, the advocate's office receives more than 3,000 calls. The majority of calls have been about standards of practice in residential care, violence between peers, children living at home with special needs and aboriginal child protection. The advocate speaks for children and youth who are unable to bring complaints forward on their own behalf. We believe that government has a responsibility to listen to everyone it serves, and we believe that includes children and youth. This legislation, if passed, would ensure that children and youth would be heard not only by this government but also by future governments.

In the east gallery today, I'm very pleased to have with us Ontario's first child advocate, Les Horne, and Matthew Geigen-Miller, who represents Defence for Children. I'm also very pleased to have Cathy Vine and Carlyn Zwarenstein on behalf of Voices for Children. And I'm happy to have Ashraf Shah, who is executive assistant to the child advocate.

As always, it gives me very great pleasure to take this opportunity to once again recognize Judy Finlay. For more than 15 years Judy Finlay has served with the utmost compassion and integrity as Ontario's chief advocate for children and youth. I have had the very real privilege of working closely with Ms. Finlay as Minister of Children and Youth Services. She has helped me to acquire a more profound and a more personalized understanding of the substantial challenges that some of Ontario's children and youth face in their day-to-day

lives. Many of us in this Legislature could not even begin to imagine the challenges that some of these kids face through no fault of their own. My actions, as well as policies and directives created by my ministry, have been guided in large part by what we have learned from reviews conducted by Ms. Finlay's office.

I would like to take a moment to read a quote from Ms. Finlay about the significance of making the advocate independent. She has said, "Independence offers the child advocate unfettered access to Ontario's most vulnerable children and a greater ability to amplify the voice of children about their affairs, concerns and wishes." In Ms. Finlay's words, "An independent child advocate has been a long time in coming to Ontario, and I applaud the government for creating this essential safeguard for the protection and well-being of our children."

We anticipate that the independent child advocate would issue annual reports and special reports as necessary, championing the systemic and perhaps individual concerns of children and youth who might otherwise not be heard. As you may recall, in 2004 as a result of concerns raised during the previous government's time in office, our government asked an independent third party to review the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy. This review addressed a number of important questions, such as: What model of governance would be particularly suitable to enhance the independence of the child advocate's office? What would be the appropriate legislative mandate for the office? What types of performance indicators would best apply to the child advocate? What resources would be needed to implement a new model?

The review surveyed literature and research reports on child advocacy and analyzed legislation and programs in other Canadian jurisdictions.

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The research consultants also consulted with many individuals and representatives of organizations, including the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy, people who have dealt with the office in a variety of professional capacities, and, even more importantly, some of the children and youth who have received services from the provincial child advocate.

The interviews and research revealed significant concerns about the perceived lack of independence of the child advocate's office and the effect that had on the credibility and effectiveness of the office's work.

The third party review recommended increasing the independence of the child advocate so that advocacy for the province's most vulnerable children and youth would be more effective. These children, including those in the care of children's aid societies and children with developmental disabilities or other special needs who are living at home and are seeking or receiving approved services, need effective advocacy to protect their rights, promote their interests, improve the quality of services that they receive, and help to prevent abuse while in provincial care. They need that voice, they deserve to have that voice, and we must provide the assurance that they will be heard. That's why we are here today moving

forward on our commitment to Ontario's children and youth.

The review also said that effective child advocacy can often help to improve communication and understanding between children and families who receive services and the agencies that serve them.

Some of the principal recommendations of the review were:

- to make the child advocate an officer of the Legislature to enhance the advocate's independence;

- to ensure that the mandate of the independent advocate largely corresponds to what the office currently does; that is, be an advocate for children whose voice is potentially diminished because they are in the care of the province;

- to provide a range of advocacy services for children and have the responsibility for responding to complaints from children, parents and others about services provided to children receiving care, as well as children with developmental and other special needs who live at home;

- to make recommendations and engage in informal dispute resolution and advocacy for children and, in limited circumstances, conduct reviews of services, participate in coroners' inquests, and provide policy advice to the Legislature.

However, the third party review also recommended that the child and youth advocate should not engage in formal advocacy in courts or before tribunals or carry investigative or adjudicative functions. It recommended that those roles should be left to other agencies and bodies, although the child and youth advocate may have an important part to play in terms of liaison and, on occasion, may contribute to certain reviews.

The review confirmed the wisdom of our government's commitment to the independence of the advocate. I would like to say that actually setting up a new officer of the Legislature is a very complex process that requires consultation. Staff from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services undertook extensive consultations with central agencies: the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Children's Lawyer, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and the current child advocate.

The policy work included work on issues such as the mandate of the proposed independent advocate; the powers and limitations of the office; privacy and access to information; and financial and human resource implications.

Consultations were conducted with the current child advocate of the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy about the operating practices of the office.

The Office of the Children's Lawyer in Ontario was also consulted to ensure that it would continue to work with a new, independent advocate in a complementary manner to assist vulnerable children and youth.

An independent child advocate's office would have to manage its own website, so consultations were also held to assess the new office's information technology requirements.

All of the consultations informed our policy development and helped produce a strong and viable new approach to child and youth advocacy in Ontario.

We took the necessary pains to put a solid policy framework in place, and this will ultimately benefit the vulnerable children and youth who would receive the support of an independent child advocate. Our government has worked hard to ensure that this legislation would serve Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth well.

There are members of this Legislature of all political persuasions who, at one point or another, have expressed support for our government's commitment to establishing an independent child advocate. So I am looking forward to all-party support of this legislation.

If the legislation that is receiving second reading today is passed, Ontario will have an independent watchdog looking out for the province's most vulnerable children and youth. By making the advocate truly independent, we will be giving children and youth the strong voice they deserve.

Thirty years ago, Ontario was a world leader in establishing child advocacy services for children in the care of the state. Since then, similar services have been established in many countries and in most Canadian provinces.

It is now time for Ontario to establish a child advocate as an independent officer of this Legislature. Establishing an independent advocate will serve not only to further protect the rights of our most precious resource but will also reinforce their right to be heard. The most vulnerable of our children and youth have not always enjoyed that right. If the proposed legislation is passed, children and youth will have a completely independent officer of the Legislature to speak on their behalf. Our government is committed to ensuring that they will be heard. This is an exceptional opportunity for this Legislature to demonstrate its support for Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth.

Our government has also been strengthening supports and services for these young people through other complementary initiatives. For example, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act, proclaimed last November, is now in effect. Reforms under this act will improve the province's child and youth well-being and protection system and further protect our vulnerable young people.

Our government has come a long way. When we took office, we inherited a lot of lost ground which we have been working hard to recover. I realize we still have a long way to go. The establishment of an independent provincial advocate for children and youth will be a giant step forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):

Just a few comments on the minister's address: She's claiming to be a very strong advocate for children and youth. I appreciate that and I'm glad to hear that, but her record would belie that statement, because recently, in

my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, the Phoenix Centre—and the minister knows well about the communications we’ve had on this issue—which provides mental health services for children and youth in Renfrew county, made an urgent appeal to the minister back in September for special funding to deal with a huge increase in the caseloads of their workers dealing with mental health issues regarding primarily families of military personnel as a result of the Afghan deployment. The minister turned them down. A second appeal was made, and the minister actually came to me in the House here and said, “Do you know what? We’re doing something to help the Phoenix Centre.” That turned out to be nothing. Recently, we had a press conference to bring this issue to the attention of the media and the public, and lo and behold, the Ombudsman himself, Mr. Marin, has determined that this requires an investigation. Interestingly, we’re talking about a child advocate here, yet, for the minister’s own actions on this issue, the Phoenix Centre and children’s mental health services in Renfrew county, the Ombudsman himself believes that it requires his action on this issue to try to get to the bottom of this and do what is right. So what’s happening here is that the minister is actually victimizing children in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for political gain—victimizing children for political gain. I think that that is reprehensible and that if the minister wants to advocate on behalf of children, she could start with the mental health of children in Renfrew county and base Petawawa.

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Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I’m pleased to have a few opportunities to speak to this bill probably today and tomorrow. I’m glad to finally see it here in the Legislature for us to deal with, because it certainly has been a long time coming. In the spirit of actual questions and comments, I have a few questions that I hope the minister will consider and perhaps respond to in her opportunity for responses.

The first question is about whether or not she really thinks that this bill meets all the measures that can be met in terms of an independent child advocate for the province of Ontario. I say that not rhetorically; I say that because we know the process of bills. We’re in second reading now and we’re going to go to committee, hopefully. At that point in time, in committee, I’m sure there will be an opportunity to hear from people about what possible improvements could be made. So I would hope that in the spirit of creating—and the minister said it herself, and I agree with her 100%, the fact that this is a rare thing to happen. The creation of a new position, a new independent officer of the Legislature, is something that doesn’t happen every day around here. Therefore it’s extremely important to get it right and to make sure that the legislation actually is going to do all of the things that it needs to do and that it should do and that we would want it to do in order to provide a voice for children in our province. So that’s the particular question that I have.

I have some recommendations, I would say, about some of the things that are in the bill and some of the

things that are not in the bill. I look forward to spending some time on that. So what I really look to the minister for is a commitment, an assurance that there will be real dialogue, that that dialogue will be productive dialogue at the committee stage and that the opportunity at committee will be for us to hear from people, certainly not to delay, because this bill has been a long time coming, but certainly to hear from people, to make this legislation the best it can be. That’s what I intend to be working on myself.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): First, before I start, I want to congratulate the minister for bringing such an important issue to the House, a provincial advocate for children and youth. I think it’s an important issue we should have dealt with a long time ago, but I’m happy and honoured to be part of a government that cares about children.

During our mandate, we listened to many people who came to our committees and spoke about how we can protect the children in the province of Ontario. A few minutes ago, we heard great accusations from the opposition of the government, the minister and many different agencies and groups, but that’s why it is important for all of us to bring this bill forward, and hopefully this bill will get support from the three parties, because it will stop the accusations. It will put everything in place. It will protect children and youth because, as you know, so many of our youth and children live in agencies and group homes and many different places. They have no family to advocate on their behalf. They have no one, and they’re also subject to abuse. That’s why I think it’s important for all of us, voted in by the people of Ontario, to protect all of us, especially the vulnerable people among us.

I want to congratulate the minister for bringing forward such an important issue, and hopefully the three parties will get together and make it a strong bill to appoint an advocate, independent from all the political parties. It’s great to be an advocate on behalf of the children, because children are our responsibility, and it’s our job to protect them and to make sure everyone lives in respect and dignity, because we need them in the future.

I think it’s a great bill. Hopefully, all of us will support it and make sure it will touch all the elements and have a great impact on future generations.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I am very pleased to be able to stand today and make a few comments on Bill 165. It is nice to see this legislation back in the House. Hopefully, we can make proper amendments, have good consultations and good committee hearings and get a bill that means a lot to today’s children.

I’m really looking forward to the comments we’ll be hearing in a few moments from our critic Lisa MacLeod, who is the youngest member of this House. She has a beautiful little girl, Victoria, whom I see the odd time upstairs on the third floor. I can tell you, I can’t think of a

better person as a critic than a young mother who actually brings her child to the provincial Legislature.

Our party is very proud of the fact that we had the first child advocate under the premiership of the Honourable William Davis. I just wanted to say that, when you're talking about children and youth, it's sad that we need someone to speak on their behalf. There's nothing more precious in the world than the children.

I just want to say something about my family. I have an eight-year-old granddaughter. Her name is Rachel. She means the world to me. She has sort of been part of my MPP political life since I got here. But I was so proud of her the other day when she went to the hairdresser and had her long, dark brown hair cut off and she donated it to the Canadian Cancer Society. She was so proud because she got this small certificate to say that she had done something for some other person who was faced with cancer. I just wanted to put that on the record. Her name is Rachel Rynard. I'm sure that someday you will see Rachel Rynard right here in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, you have two minutes to respond.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I'd like to start my response, if I may, by recognizing the member from Simcoe North and congratulating him for obviously being a very positive influence on his granddaughter. I think that's wonderful and I agree that she should feel very proud of herself and you should feel very proud of her. I would like to give you and your family some recognition for instilling that kind of spirit in her.

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke unfortunately was kind of misguided in his comments. I'll forgive him for that, but he needs to understand that one of the reasons we have this commitment is because his government muzzled the advocate when the advocate had very, very serious issues to bring forward in the past. We want to make sure that no government ever has that opportunity again, whether ours or any other government in the future.

The member from Hamilton East, I can assure you that we want to make sure we get this right. This will go to committee, and I will look forward to any enhancements you and others can make to this bill. And yes, we do want it to be the best that it can be so it can serve the children of this province well, because they deserve no less.

To my colleague the member from London–Fanshawe, thank you for your support. I know how you feel as well about Ontario's most vulnerable children, as do all of my colleagues on this side of the House. We are looking forward to all-party support of this legislation and, yes, we will work together in the interests of children in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): It's a pleasure to be back here today with all of you. Today is a very important day in the Legislature. It's the first time in Ontario's history that the Legislature has 25% women sitting in these seats, and that's because of my friend

Joyce Savoline from Burlington. I want to congratulate her. It's a tremendous feat; it's very historic.

I also want to congratulate two other colleagues, from York South–Weston and from Markham. I think it's tremendous that they were able to participate in the democratic process, and I think all three political parties are richer for it. Joyce, I'm so pleased that you're here with us today.

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I'd also like to acknowledge some people in the gallery whom the third party critic is talking to right now. They are Les Horne, our first child advocate, appointed by Premier Davis; Matthew Geigen-Miller, who I think is probably one of the foremost experts in the country on the independence of a child advocate; Judy Finlay, who is our current chief Ontario child advocate; and Cathy Vine and her colleagues from Voices for Children. They should all be congratulated for their work on behalf of children in this province. Certainly throughout the period of my research their names popped up everywhere. They have tremendous insight, and we're very proud to have you here, so thank you very much.

As I mentioned in first reading, my party, the Progressive Conservative Party, is proud to have been the first to introduce the child advocate in Ontario, who was Les Horne, under the premiership of Bill Davis in 1984. Premier Davis established IMPAC in 1977, which is the interministerial provincial advisory committee, by which we are now able to have ministries work across boundaries to provide a forum for agencies and families to enable better access for children. In 1978, Mr. Davis established Canada's first provincial advocacy office, the Office of Child and Family Services Advocacy, which was later entrenched in legislation when Mr. Davis's government introduced the Child and Family Services Act.

This great man, Premier Davis, was far ahead of his time. After all, it was only 1993 when the United Nations adopted the Paris Principles, calling on governments worldwide to establish government bodies for the protection of children and youth. Premier Davis was the first in this province to envision a government body which would bring together expertise in the areas of child welfare, children's mental health, developmental disability, youth justice, education, health, family treatment and children's rights in order to best serve Ontario's children. Because of Bill Davis's vision and leadership, Ontario's child advocate became a model for governments across this country, and our chief advocates, Les Horne and Judy Finlay, have set the standard worldwide for effective advocacy on behalf of children everywhere. For that, I truly want to thank them.

The McGuinty Liberals, on the other hand, have delayed and dithered on matters relating to children and youth, and I want to touch on this before I get into my direct concerns with this bill. In fact, of the 231 promises that were made to Ontarians during the last election—the “Say anything and get elected” election—the McGuinty Liberals made about 30 promises related to children and

youth. More than half have been broken and others have only been partially implemented. The Minister of Children and Youth Services talks a good game, but of course she would want to after a dismal record in the three and a half years since the McGuinty Liberals took office. They talk about their commitment to children and youth, yet the kids of military men and women serving in Afghanistan are suffering as resource centres on military bases across Ontario, like the Phoenix Centre in Petawawa, are underfunded and basically ignored by the minister, even during a time of elevated crisis on the bases on which they serve. The McGuinty Liberals will talk about their commitment to children and youth in Ontario, yet they have not moved forward on increasing resources to children's mental health in this province. The Minister of Children and Youth Services has a framework on her desk submitted by Children's Mental Health Ontario, but what has she done with the framework? Nothing. There has been no implementation plan, no implementation timeline and no desire on her part—or, worse, no clout around the cabinet table for children and youth matters—in order to move this important issue forward.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services and the McGuinty Liberal government muse about how much better off children are in Ontario today because they are in power. But, sadly, parents of autistic kids will tell you otherwise. After breaking an election promise to autistic children immediately after being elected in 2003—which is entirely heartless, in and of itself—the McGuinty Liberal government had the audacity to continue court action against their parents. Adding insult to a series of injuries, these same McGuinty Liberals then added another commitment to these already disillusioned parents by introducing ABA in the classroom within the next six months, a commitment which we all know will be very difficult for them to keep, just to put that mildly. The Liberals have also broken their promises to autistic kids with inexcusably long wait lists. Think about it this way: These families have had to endure exhausting legal action, repeated broken promises, counterproductive politicking, and three and a half years later they are still waiting for this government to be honest and straight-forward with them.

The parents of autistic kids have ample reason to be skeptical. As one parent told me last week, this new McGuinty government commitment on ABA is wide enough, with a hole in it, that you could drive an entire Mack truck through it, which I think is pitiful and shameful. And then, as if this turmoil isn't enough, the McGuinty Liberal government has put families living with autism through even more turmoil by turning around and slapping the autism community's biggest advocate, our honourable colleague from Nickel Belt, Shelley Martel, with legal action. The McGuinty Liberals just don't get it. That is not how you advocate on behalf of Ontario's children.

My colleagues, since I've arrived back here at the Legislature, have also brought up issues in their own

communities. For example, in Kawartha Lakes there are zero Best Start spaces. It's the only place in all of Ontario without a space. I know that my colleague Laurie Scott has been working very hard to try to get those Best Start spaces in Lindsay. My other colleagues Christine Elliott, Jerry Ouellette and John O'Toole have spoken in this Legislature about the \$3 million that is needed to continue mental health services at Lakeridge Health Corp., yet those continue to be cut.

The Liberals have had ample opportunity to govern by example in advocating for our province's most vulnerable children. In my opinion, they've squandered this opportunity. The Liberals' dithering, delaying and deception on the children and youth file is unacceptable. The McGuinty Liberals made a promise in 2003 to appoint an independent child advocate. They said at the time that a future Liberal government would pass legislation creating an independent office of the child advocate. This office would report to the Legislature rather than the government. The legislation would require the appointment of the child advocate through an all-party committee of the Legislature. This appointment would be for a fixed term. The legislation would also require the child advocate's budget to be set by the Board of Internal Economy.

Yet instead of acting on their promise, after they were elected, they dithered, they delayed and they deceived. After the election, the McGuinty Liberals stalled by commissioning private consultants to undertake a review. Almost two years—

The Deputy Speaker: Would the member take her seat. I do think the word “deceived” is one that she might consider withdrawing.

Ms. MacLeod: I withdraw that, Speaker.

Almost two years after the initial promise, the Liberals stated that legislation was “imminent.” From there, it took another 20 months, more than three years after the initial promise, for the McGuinty Liberals to follow through. I need to put this in perspective. The second promise is as old as my two-year-old daughter, Victoria, who was a newborn at the time of the first promise. She is now walking, talking, toilet training and doing all the other wonderful things a toddler does when she's entering the terrible twos. But two years is a long time to sit and pontificate on a promise to children: vulnerable children, children at risk, children who need the government to speak for them because they cannot speak for themselves. Mr. Speaker, these kids do not have two years to wait for an inactive government.

Ironically, this legislation, as you'll recall, was miraculously introduced the same day we learned of a leaked Auditor General's report which detailed millions of misspent tax dollars intended for children at risk in our province. On the same day the Minister of Children and Youth Services introduced legislation for an independent children's advocate for vulnerable kids, we learned that, under the leadership of the McGuinty Liberals, they had abandoned financial reviews on children's aid societies. We learned that, under her leadership, the McGuinty

Liberals had cancelled risk assessments for vulnerable kids. We learned that, under her leadership, the McGuinty Liberals ignored quarterly reports in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. And sadly, on the same day this bill was introduced to create an independent child advocate, we learned, in the leaked Auditor General's report, that this McGuinty Liberal government lowered accountability standards when it came to helping children at risk in this province. That is the abysmal commitment to children and youth by the McGuinty Liberals and this minister.

Life goes on, and because of this, children at risk in Ontario have suffered under the McGuinty Liberals' ineffective and unfocused government. Again, you need look no further than last December. Children in Ontario deserve better.

During first reading, I made a commitment in this Legislature. I assured Ontarians that the Ontario PC Party would take this legislation very seriously. We would study it, we would consult on it, and we would make sure that this government gets it right. Today, I assure you that we will be active participants in this legislation and that we have studied this bill. We have consulted on it. Since last December, I have discussed children's issues with children's organizations throughout this province. I am here to make sure the McGuinty Liberal government gets it right, because, as we have seen in other legislation that has come before us, they simply put forward a bill without understanding the complexities of the issues they are dealing with, and the actual legislation sometimes misses the mark.

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As an active participant in this debate on the independent child advocate, I have some concerns. Primarily, it seems that the longer the crowd opposite waits to draft and introduce legislation, the more hastily drafted and less consultative the bill before us appears.

I know I've touched on the timeline earlier, but I want to delve a little bit more deeply into the timeline on this particular legislation.

In July 2003, the McGuinty Liberals issued a press release promising that a future Liberal government would pass legislation creating an independent office of the child advocate that would report to the Legislature rather than the government. By fall of 2003, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services commissioned researchers to study the Child and Family Services Act and develop recommendations regarding the establishment of a new office of the child and youth advocate. The contract for this review was granted to a consortium of four researchers organized by Whitehead Research Consultants Ltd., a London, Ontario-based consulting firm. Then, in 2004, nine months after the initial promise, the third party review began.

In August 2004, when the final report of the third party review was submitted to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, one would have thought that the McGuinty Liberal government would have been prepared to include the critics from both the official opposition and

the third party, particularly since the McGuinty Liberals have been advocating that this position would be an independent officer of this Legislature, and that with this new role there would be no room for political interference or partisanship. Rather, they continued to stonewall.

Sadly, the March to June 2005 spring sitting came and went. The government did not introduce a bill that spring, as they had promised. So too went the fall sitting of 2005 and the spring sitting of 2006. By then, we had learned what the word "imminent" means to the serial promise-breakers across the way. According to most dictionaries, "imminent" means forthcoming, pending, about to happen, looming, coming up or just around the corner. To those who say anything to get elected without contemplating the implications of their broken promises or the cavalier choice of their wording, "imminent" actually takes on the meaning of its antonym: distant. One can only conclude that the words "this spring" and "imminent" are used as recklessly by the McGuinty Liberals as "I will not raise your taxes." Obviously, when this government says one thing, it clearly means another.

So off in the distance, on November 30, 2006, the Minister of Children and Youth Services finally introduced Bill 165, legislation the Liberals had promised was imminent a full 20 months earlier. Again, it seems the longer the crowd waits to draft and introduce legislation, the more hastily drafted and less consultative the bill before us appears.

Therefore, because this bill was hastily drafted, perhaps because of the damning Auditor General's report, there should be no surprise that there are serious concerns with this bill on this side of the House. We will be asking the critical questions: Because of the timeline, are we any closer to getting an independent child advocate, or will this legislation die on the order paper when the legislative session is scheduled to end in less than three months? I note that there are still 125 bills left on the order paper. Is the model before us the right model? If not, how can we improve this legislation? And are we going to do everything we can to do what's best for the kids?

While this bill does address some key issues lacking in the current system and does answer some of the key questions, there are still several areas where there is need for improvement. My concerns are:

(1) A lack of consultation with stakeholders and with parliamentary colleagues.

(2) I don't believe this bill has real teeth: no investigative powers, no ability to summons witnesses, no ability to summons evidence, and no ability to review child deaths.

(3) Children's access to the advocate is not guaranteed, and entrance to facilities by the advocate is restricted.

(4) Although the scope and mandate of this office is broad, the bill still manages to leave out two groups that are presently protected by the current office of the chief children's advocate.

These are four concerns about this piece of legislation. The fact that these concerns have not been addressed indicates exactly the point I alluded to earlier, which is that the longer they wait to introduce legislation, the more hastily drafted their bills are.

Let's look more closely into my concerns. First, lack of consultation: It should not be out of the realm of possibility to any concerned Ontarian that with the delay of introducing legislation, the Minister of Children and Youth Services would have had plenty of time to consult stakeholders across the children and youth spectrum. Unfortunately, we learned from groups across the children and youth spectrum that they were not part of the consultative process in drafting this bill. In fact, we learned there was very little input from the very communities the bill is intended to help. Just like Bill 107, the human rights act, and Bill 43, the Clean Water Act, we are again in a position during legislative debate in this chamber that leaves us speaking to a bill that has not been properly consulted among key stakeholders in the sector.

As an example, my colleague the member for York North, Julia Munro, asked the Minister of Children and Youth Services back in October 2006 why, after years of being lead advocates for an independent child advocate and publishing a comprehensive report on issues entitled *Child Advocacy Renewal in Ontario: Progress Report and Agenda for Action*, Defence for Children International was unable to secure a meeting with the Minister of Children and Youth Services on this legislation, despite the assertion made by the Minister of Children and Youth Services that she was conducting extensive consultations. In fact, the minister's response to Ms. Munro was, "You cannot start to imagine how many requests for meetings we receive."

Mr. Speaker, I think you would agree that if the leading experts in the field of child advocacy were still trying to seek a meeting with the Minister of Children and Youth Services three weeks before she introduced the bill, then their input was clearly not considered in the meaningful way one might expect. Rather, considering the Minister of Children and Youth Services addressed Ms. Munro's question so cavalierly, one can conclude that she was unprepared to meet with key stakeholders in the sector until after her department had prepared a bill the McGuinty Liberal government could live with rather than a bill that considered what is best for Ontario's children.

In fact, let me read an excerpt from the *Child Advocacy Renewal* report written by Defence for Children International on the McGuinty Liberal government's consultations.

"The Ontario government does not appear to have conducted any other major consultation on research projects regarding its commitment to strengthen child advocacy," referring to the McGuinty Liberal government's third party review.

In addition, the report points out this major concern: "There are a number of concerns about weaknesses in the

process of the third party review. Generally, these weaknesses relate to three findings regarding the methods and the process of the review. Namely that the review was completely controlled by officials at the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the review was rushed and the review did not include adequate consultation with affected young people."

To expound on these three points: Officials of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services determined the scope and parameters of the review. Therefore, the consultation findings could be considered as having been influenced by the minister's department. In addition, for a piece of legislation which has been promised for three years, the review was only afforded about eight weeks to conduct research and report findings, which was an insufficient amount of time to undertake a thorough policy and research initiative. Finally, with close to 25,000 children in this province relying on the current child advocate, the review, at best, interviewed six children—six children out of 25,000.

In addition, if the Minister of Children and Youth Services was truly serious about making an effort to ensure that this is a truly non-partisan issue, she would have made one of the most grand gestures of this sitting of the Legislature: She could have invited myself and my colleague from the third party to share our visions on the best way to protect children in Ontario. She could have worked with us to achieve the best for children in Ontario.

But to the contrary, in keeping with the tradition of saying anything and doing anything, the McGuinty Liberal government hastily drafted a bill without consultation, what appears to be a stop-gap, instant piece of legislation in front of this chamber that would help them sleep at night after we learned of the atrocities of the children's aid society leak in the Auditor General's report.

Of particular concern, whenever our party through myself, the member from North York or the critic from the third party asked the tough questions regarding the consultation needed for the bill or the expected timeline for the introduction of this bill, the Minister of Children and Youth Services responded with severe partisanship. While Defence for Children International has implored politicians to work together on this legislation and put children's needs above partisanship, there has been no effort on the part of the minister to do just that.

Nevertheless, we have this legislation before us and, without consultation, we are left with several other concerns. If the Minister of Children and Youth Services and her government wanted to give this office the teeth it needs and allow it to be a truly effective office, she might have included investigative powers as one of the authorities attributed to this office, yet this is not the case. As we found out from the McGuinty Liberal reaction to the recent revelations of the misappropriations of funds at the children's aid societies, simply giving someone a title or giving them the right to investigate is not enough. If this office has no investigative authority,

one has to ask whether the McGuinty Liberal government is truly serious about an independent office for child advocacy or just the appearance of one.

Throughout Canada, advocacy offices exist with varying degrees of powers and authorities. Unfortunately, as revealed by Matthew Geigen-Miller's *Defence for Children International* report *It's Time to Break the Silence*—and to care—Ontario lags far behind other provinces when it comes to the right to enter residential facilities, the right to access and examine records regarding applicable services to children and youth, and the ability to summon witnesses and examine them under oath for the purposes of investigation.

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Even with this new independence, Ontario will not be as progressive as provinces like Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. In fact, last May the British Columbia government unveiled their plan to give their children's advocacy office the power to review and investigate deaths and injuries of children in foster care.

The McGuinty Liberal bill does not include in the mandate of the office a role in child death reviews, yet experts suggest this is necessary. Take, for example, the Chan Durrant report in Alberta, published in 2005. It maintains, "Actual and perceived independence in death reviews is essential. Current processes, including special case reviews with the Ministry of Children's Services, do not appear objective because the decision to review, and most participants to the review, are internal to the system."

The report goes on to add, "[A]n external, objective child death review process is the only way to secure public and professional confidence in a system designed to learn from these tragic situations and prevent similar occurrences."

Cathy Vine, who's with us today, is the executive director of Voice for Children. Three weeks prior to the introduction of this bill, she wrote, "The children's advocate needs the independence, authority and resources to consult directly with children and youth, respond to their requests to investigate abuses or problems in the system, inform them of their rights, demand progress reports from the government, review deaths of children in care and seek standing at inquests."

Another concern surrounds the fact that this new legislation has no provision to guarantee that children have access to the advocate and indeed no provision to guarantee that the advocate has access to facilities under his or her mandate. Children, under the mandate of the advocate, do not have the right to have a private conversation with the advocate's office. They do not even have a right to know about the existence of the advocate. Common sense dictates that if a young person in our province has a problem and feels the need to speak to his or her advocate, that same young person should be able to speak to that advocate in private. Would you expect a young person who's troubled to be open and honest with the advocate if the person they were having issues with

was standing over their shoulder, listening to their conversation?

It might seem like common sense to my colleagues here, but this is exactly the sort of thing that we need to look at to ensure this bill is what is best for the children. This is what's missing from the bill. In this day and age, we need to make sure the legislation we pass is clear so there are no loopholes.

In addition to the shortcomings regarding children's access to the advocate, the legislation also restricts access by the advocate to facilities under his or her mandate. The specific section in the act restricting the advocate's access fails to clarify whatsoever the rights of the advocate to enter a premises and, rather, confuses the advocate's access to facilities by restricting access.

We all know the current child advocate takes over 3,000 calls each year from troubled youth, children at risk and others who are in need of advocacy. The majority of these calls are about standards of practice for children living in residential care, peer-on-peer violence, children living at home with special needs, and aboriginal child welfare. These are Ontario's most vulnerable children. Yet this legislation, while it appears to propose a new-found independence and separation from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, in practical terms does not indicate in explicit, direct and clear language that the advocate should have the right to enter the premises where the children under the office's mandate are receiving services, nor does the legislation clearly state the right of entry by the advocate. It would appear that the McGuinty Liberal government has engaged in a game of smoke and mirrors with this legislation. Without the right of entry, one has to question if this legislation will achieve the goals its makers would lead us to believe will occur.

Another concern that follows this point is that while the scope and mandate of this office is broad, it leaves out two groups who are presently protected by the current office of the chief children's advocate. Currently, the advocate's mandate covers the following client groups:

- children and youth seeking or receiving approved services under the CFSA;

- young people in custody and detention under the CFSA and Ministry of Correctional Services Act;

- young people held in police or court holding cells; and young people transported to or from police or court holding cells while in custody; and

- students in schools for the deaf and schools for the blind and demonstration schools. Yet for some reason, two of these groups are left out of Bill 165. Students in schools for the deaf, schools for the blind and demonstration schools are left out. This group was added to the mandate of the advocate in 1992 following the Report of the Review of Student Care at the Provincial Schools for the Deaf and Blind and Demonstration Schools. The report raised concerns about the lack of residential care standards for the operation of residential schools, ineffective child abuse reporting procedures, harsh and degrading treatment of students, use of corporal punishment and

an absence of case advocacy for students. If you ask me, that sounds like something the advocate would be especially suited for.

The next group that is excluded is young people held in police or court holding cells and young people transported to or from police or court holding cells. This group was added to the mandate of the advocate in 1998 following the report of *Voices from Within: Youth Speak Out*. This report noted young people's concerns, particularly a lack of privacy, poor conditions, a lack of appropriate supervision and being placed near adult offenders. Again, to me this sounds like something that should be covered under Bill 165, yet for some reason this group has been left out.

Rather than include these two important groups, the legislation prefers to deal in generalities. Particularly, Bill 165 establishes the position of Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The appointed advocate is an officer of the Legislative Assembly, and the functions of the advocate are to:

“(a) provide advocacy to children and youth who are seeking or receiving approved services under the *Child and Family Services Act*;

“(b) provide advocacy to young persons who are being dealt with under the *Ministry of Correctional Services Act*;

“(c) promote the rights under part V of the *Child and Family Services Act* of children in care and the rights under Part V of the *Ministry of Correctional Services Act* of young persons in custody; and

“(d) provide any other advocacy that is permitted under the regulations or any other act.”

Today, the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy is a safeguard for young people in Ontario. It is mandated to coordinate and administer a system of advocacy, except for advocacy before a court, on behalf of children and families who receive or seek certain services provided by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and to advise the minister on matters and issues concerning the interests of those children and families. In practical terms, this means the advocate provides assistance to young people who are in the care of the government, their families, and also to family members of young people with special needs. This legislation needs to be improved to include these two vulnerable groups.

While these issues are of utmost concern to me—and I am sure we will hear some of the same criticisms of the bill from the third party—I am reminded of an article celebrating National Child Day which was published on November 20 last year. Again, it was written by Cathy Vine. She pondered that Canada's young people “are perhaps the last major group systematically excluded from decision-making.” She continues, “This leaves them completely dependent on the goodwill of adults for their health, safety, and capacity to develop and thrive.” How right she is. Yet this legislation leaves out two very vulnerable groups who are most dependent on the goodwill of adults for their health, their safety and their capacity to develop and thrive. Deaf students, blind

students and troubled youth should not lose those advocacy services. They should not be excluded from this legislation.

As Cathy also points out, “Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth—approximately 25,000 in government care through children's aid societies, in mental health systems, in residential schools for the hearing or visually impaired, in detention, or police custody or other settings—depend on a system that too often fails them utterly.”

Cathy, I'm just looking at you in awe for being able to pen those words, because I know they came from your heart.

To bring my remarks full circle about what is best for the kids and the rights of these kids to be heard, I'd like to take a quote from a report published by Defence for Children International in June 2006. In the conclusion of their report titled *Child Advocacy in Ontario*, they point out that, “The Ontario government owes young people a unique duty of consultation in the project to establish a new office of the child and youth advocate.

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“First, section 107 of the *Child and Family Services Act* guarantees young people living in residential care the right to be heard and for their views to be considered, when the government or service providers make decisions that will affect them.

“This right applies to children living in foster homes, young offender detention and custody facilities, and other residential facilities licensed under the act, such as group homes and children's mental health centres.

“Second, article 12.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to be heard, and for their views to be considered, when a government makes decisions that will affect them.

“The young people who are entitled to be consulted under these provisions include children and youth who fall under the mandate of OCFSA, and/or the anticipated mandate of the proposed office of the child and youth advocate. The meagre consultation attempted under the third party review is clearly inadequate.

“Further, MCYS has not attempted or proposed any further consultation with young people following the third party review. In March 2005, DCI-Canada submitted a proposal to MCYS to conduct a consultation with affected young people regarding child advocacy renewal in Ontario, but this proposal was rejected.

“The Ontario government has not approached a reasonable standard of consultation with young people regarding the project to establish a new office of the child and youth advocate.”

The report goes on to say, “The government has not indicated the reason for the delay, nor has it announced a new timeline for the introduction of a bill. It is clear that a bill cannot be introduced earlier than the fall 2006 sitting of the Legislature, leaving only one year in the present term of government to pass the necessary legislation. Unless child advocacy renewal becomes a priority for this government in the very near future, it is

unlikely the Ontario Liberal Party's promise to establish a new office of the child and youth advocate will be delivered in the present term of government."

It seems I'm not the only one skeptical of the McGuinty Liberal government's promises, not by a long shot.

In Cathy Vine's article, she quotes Stephanie Ma, author of *Just Listen to Me*. Ms. Vine attributes the following to Ms. Ma: "What good have our voices done?" At the time, Ms. Vine was referring to the fact that the McGuinty Liberal government had only a year left in its mandate. Today there is even less time left. She says what we all know: Children don't have time to wait.

The biggest issue before us is to ensure that the right bill gets passed in this House. What is particularly discouraging about the task ahead is the fact that the bill was introduced so late in the McGuinty Liberal government's mandate. Defence for Children International and I share a similar concern. Their 2006 report had an eerie warning: "If the introduction of the bill occurs too late in the period only two outcomes will be possible: the bill will die on the order paper ... or, the bill will pass but will have to be rushed through the Legislature, preventing thorough consultation with stakeholders and debate by members. Either of these possibilities would undermine the public's confidence that the government is acting diligently, appropriately, and in the public interest." That statement was prophetic in that we are now, because of the government's delay in the introduction of this legislation and the lack of consultation by the minister, sadly strapped with one of the two possible outcomes above, a bill which may never see royal assent, or, equally as troublesome, a bill that is so rushed that they simply won't get it right.

Again, I'll not kid you. The fact that the McGuinty Liberal government waited so long to introduce this legislation I believe is indicative of their lack of commitment on the independence of this office. Matthew Geigen-Miller, in the report entitled *It's Time to Break the Silence*, outlined 25 recommendations that Defence for Children International would like to see enacted. Though some of these have found their way into the current legislation before us, others are noticeably absent. In the interest of providing input into this debate on behalf of some of the stakeholders who would like to have their voices heard, not the least of whom are children and youth who were left out of the consultations, I am going to read into the record these 25 recommendations on behalf of them.

"(1) Appointment: The advocate should be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council upon the resolution of the Legislative Assembly, or upon the recommendation of a committee of the Legislative Assembly. The advocate should be an independent officer accountable to the Legislative Assembly.

"(2) Term: The advocate should be appointed for a term of five years, with the possibility of reappointment for one additional term....

"(3) Budget: The advocate's budget should be determined through a process similar to that used for the Auditor General. The advocate should present a budget annually to the Board of Internal Economy. Money required to fulfill the advocate's mandate should be appropriated by the Legislative Assembly....

"(4) Annual report: The advocate should be required to submit an annual report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

"(5) Special reports: The advocate should be empowered to publish and release to the public any other reports regarding children and youth in Ontario that it deems to be in the public interest....

"(6) Included services: The advocate should be mandated to provide advocacy services for young people and families seeking or receiving, or subject to the following government services

"—All services provided to young people under the Child and Family Services Act;

"—Arrest, detention and custody under the Youth Criminal Justice Act;

"—Mental health services for persons under the age of 18 provided under the Mental Health Act;

"—Schools for the deaf and blind and demonstration schools;

"—Residential and community services for children with developmental and other special needs, and their families....

"(7) Individual and group advocacy: The advocate should establish a continuum of advocacy services for young people and families seeking or receiving services, including

"—Provide information, advice and support regarding services; rights; and complaint, review or appeal processes;

"—Receive and review complaints regarding services and alleged abuses of rights;

"—At the request of a young person or family, make non-adversarial advocacy interventions such as negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution;

"—At the request of a young person or family, convene a case conference with service providers, affected persons, and other appropriate participants;

"—In response to a complaint or on its own motion, conduct a review of the conditions and practices within a facility, and of the perspectives of young people who live in the facility;

"—Conduct investigations into services for young people and families;

"—On behalf of a young person who is receiving services, perform any of the above functions in response to complaints and matters that address any service within the jurisdiction of the province of Ontario, including public education and health care....

"(8) Systemic advocacy: The advocate should establish a range of systemic advocacy services, including

"—Conduct or commission research regarding services for young people and families, and/or the rights,

interests and perspectives of young people who receive services;

“—Review and comment on legislation, policies or practices regarding services for young people and families;

“—Provide advice to ministers and committees of the Legislature regarding services for young people and families....

“(9) Public education, capacity building and youth participation: The advocate should establish a range of public education, capacity building and youth participation activities which may include the following:

“—Conduct public education regarding the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and youth;

“—Promote the rights of children and youth, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;

“—Establish programs or projects that build capacity for advocacy, education or child and youth participation within facilities, agencies, communities and ministries of the government;

“—Establish programs or projects for the participation of young people who receive services in decisions that affect them....

“(10) Death reviews: The advocate should be required to review the circumstances of every death of a young person who was receiving services or received services within six months at the time of his or her death. The purpose of a death review is

“—To assess the impact of government services in the young person's life; and,

“—To identify what role, if any, government services played in the young person's death....

“(11) Election, mode of review: Upon the report of a child death by the coroner and the provision of a coroner's report, the advocate should make an election to conduct a death review

“—Informally through a review of records and voluntary disclosures of persons interested in the review; or,

“—Formally by conducting an investigation....

“(12) Right to refuse or cease to act: The advocate should be empowered to refuse or cease to act in response to any complaint made by a young person or family if, in the opinion of the advocate, the complaint is frivolous or made in bad faith....

“(13) Right of entry: The advocate should be empowered to enter any premises or facility in which young people are placed for care....

“(14) Conduct investigation: The advocate should be empowered to conduct an investigation

“—In respect of a complaint or group of complaints when less intrusive measures have been attempted and have failed to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the advocate; or,

“—To identify, arrest and prevent conditions or practices that, in the opinion of the advocate, threaten the life, security or dignity of young people; or,

“—For the purpose of a death review.

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“(15) Notice required: Before initiating an investigation the advocate should provide written notice to the responsible minister(s) and to the administrative head of the ministry, agency or service provider subject to investigation. The notice should indicate the reason for the investigation.

“(16) Investigative powers: For the purpose of an investigation, the advocate should be empowered to

“—Enter any premises in which services are provided, including a facility or office, and examine or copy any record;

“—Summon witnesses and examine them under oath;

“—Require a witness to produce records or other things for examination;

“—Make recommendations to any department, agency or service provider that is within the jurisdiction of the province of Ontario....

“(17) Require reports: When an investigation has occurred, the advocate should be empowered to require any department, agency or service provider to whom a recommendation was addressed to provide reports on the progress of the implementation of that recommendation according to deadlines established by the advocate....

“(18) Protection from proceedings: No proceeding should lie against the advocate or persons acting under its delegation for actions taken in the course of their duties that were performed in good faith....

“(19) Duty of caregiver: Caregivers in facilities or placements for young people should be required to

“—Inform all young people in the placement or facility of the existence of the advocate; and,

“—Forward a communication from a young person to the advocate without delay. In the case of a letter, it should be forwarded unopened....

“(20) Offences: It should be a punishable offence for any person to

“—Obstruct the advocate from performing its duties;

“—Fail to appear when summoned for the purpose of an investigation;

“—Fail to comply with a requirement of the advocate;

“—Make false statements to the advocate;

“—By threats, intimidation or other means, discourage or prevent a young person from communicating with the advocate....

“(21) Duty of coroner: A coroner should be required to notify the advocate of a death of a young person who was receiving services, or who received services within the previous six months, at the time of his or her death. The coroner should also be required to furnish the advocate with copies of its records and reports regarding the death....

“(22) Rights information materials: The government must take immediate action to ensure that rights information materials are produced and distributed to all facilities, foster homes and other placements. These materials should [be] age-appropriate in language and presentation. Rights and advocacy information should also be available on the Internet. Every young person in

care should be aware of his or her rights, and of the existence of the advocacy office.

“(23) Additional staff: The Minister of Community, Family and Children’s Services should consult with the advocacy office to determine what additional staff are required to meet demands for service in the short term. Additional staff should be provided as needed.”

I just want to make a point here. I want to step outside of the 25 recommendations at this particular moment because in my research I have learned from DCI and from Voices for Children that we are understaffed in this province compared to every other province in Canada. We are the largest province, we probably have more children in care here than anywhere else, and we are understaffed tremendously. I want to say, “Thank you,” right now to Judy, who I know takes over 3,000 calls a year. The work your office does is amazing.

I’ll go back.

“(24) Task force: The government should establish a child advocacy renewal task force as a mechanism for the input of stakeholders in the development and implementation of a new child and youth advocate. This task force should include representation from a range of groups that will be affected by the advocate’s services, and experts on child advocacy and child rights. This includes young people with experience in child protection, youth justice and mental health care, and provincial schools; families of children with special needs; experts from non-government organizations; labour representatives; representatives from other advocacy agencies such as the Ombudsman and the children’s lawyer; and representatives of associations such as OACAS, OARTY, CMHO, and Community Living Ontario.

“The mandate of the task force should be to advise the government and Legislature during the drafting, legislation, and pre-implementation phases of child advocacy renewal.” I’m sorry that this has not occurred. “Also, the task force should assist in the implementation of the new child and youth advocate by advising the advocate during the first year of operation.”

Unfortunately, number 24 is no longer valid. I think that we really missed an opportunity in the Legislature.

“(25) Continuity: During the transition to the new child and youth advocate, the current advocacy office’s leadership and staff should be mandated to remain in place and continue the functions of the existing office. The child advocacy renewal task force, as part of its mandate, should specifically consider recommendations to incorporate the expertise and knowledge of the current advocacy office into the renewed office.”

These are 25 recommendations that I believe were drafted, researched and reviewed by some of the most effective advocates and researchers and experts in the field. They’ve done a tremendous job. Having reviewed the bill, I’m not sure that the minister or the minister’s office reviewed any of that research. I’ve printed off all kinds of copies in my office and I’d be happy to provide her and her staff with this information, because it seems to have been missing from the draft of the bill.

In any event, I know I have a few minutes left, but in the interest of debate I’m going to just wrap it up very quickly by first saying that the official opposition is here. We’re waiting to be engaged in this process. We’re waiting to be listened to and we’re willing to sit down with the minister and her staff in a meaningful dialogue if they are ever so interested. I know that my colleague in the third party would be interested in that dialogue and that level of consultation as well.

These recommendations and this entire debate truly put Les Horne’s words in perspective when he writes, “The case for listening to children is more than proved.” He continues with a quote made famous by children attending the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2002: “We are children whose voices are not being heard: It is time we were taken into account. We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone.” This is particularly touching to me, as a mother who is really missing her little two-year-old daughter right now, who’s back in Ottawa with her dad and not at the Legislature today with me, where she normally is.

In closing, I impart to my colleagues the words of Frederick Douglass, the American abolitionist, author, statesman and reformer, who once said, “It’s easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” Let us all ponder that thought as we prepare for the next stages of this legislation so that we in this chamber are doing what is best for the children and we are getting this bill right.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I look forward to your questions and comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Horwath: It’s my pleasure to make a few remarks on the comments of my colleague the Conservative critic for children and youth services. I have to say that I respect the comments she has made. She spent much of her time relying on the work of some extremely dedicated people in this province who we are quite lucky to have, who are very engaged in this debate and in this initiative and effort to try to finally come to a place where we have an independent child advocate in the province of Ontario. So I am looking forward to my full remarks, which are going to begin this afternoon and probably end tomorrow night, but I was going to say it’s going to be awfully repetitive, quite possibly, because a number of the issues that my colleague has raised are ones I wanted to put on the record as well. I will figure that out myself over the next little while so as not to bore everyone in this chamber to tears.

But I do respect the work that she’s done on this bill so far in terms of her analysis and I really do have to echo her particular call to the minister. It’s what I raised, in fact, in my first opportunity to give questions and comments on the minister’s opening remarks on the bill, and that is the need for us to make sure that this is not done in a haphazard or half-measure way, but that we put the time and effort into a proper child advocate office and that we make sure it does all of the things we want it to do, not for us, not for those who sit around this chamber,

but for the children of Ontario whose voice it is that needs to be amplified in the office of the child advocate. That's the whole point of having an independent child advocate: to amplify the voices of children and the needs that they have in terms of their government.

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Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I have to say I am absolutely delighted to be able to speak, even if for only a couple of minutes, on this very important legislation. I think that our responsibility, as legislators, to kids in care is something we have to focus on a lot more than we have in the past.

I want to take a moment to thank Judy Finlay and everyone at the office of the child advocate for the outstanding work you do. I had a private member's bill that dealt with kids in care. It deals with their ability to carry on at school when they come into care and if they have to move as a result of that. Through my homework on that, I got to know some people at the office of the child advocate, and I am enormously impressed with the work they do.

These kids we are talking about have a lot to say, and they have a very important message, if only we would listen to them. They know what they need. They know what government should be doing and isn't. I think the more we can strengthen that voice, the better we all will be.

I happen to live across the street from a group home with teenaged girls living in it. Any chance I do get to sit on my front porch, I see the girls across the way. To be honest, my heart breaks for them, because I know they have had tremendous challenges. They are in that home because of reasons beyond their control, and they are doing their very best to get their lives back in order. We must listen to them, we must act on their suggestions, and having an independent child advocate will allow us to do that better.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I am pleased to comment on the outstanding job that our critic for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services has done in her role on committee and in listening and being a critic. She is standing up for children. She has first-hand experience. She has listened to what the people have said about Bill 165, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act. The minister should take up the offer by my colleague to sit down and to work together to get the best solution that we can, the best advocacy that we can for the children.

The minister is quite familiar with the situation I have in my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock in the Best Start cases. Some 15,000 Best Start spaces were created in Ontario; Kawartha–Victoria was the only municipality that got zero.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: And you know why.

Ms. Scott: I'm glad the minister has spoken up, because we've asked the Auditor General to look into the situation, and I asked the minister in a letter in January—because this has gone on for several months; we've tried to work together—to please tell the service area what is wrong.

Interjection.

Ms. Scott: The service managers in the municipality of Kawartha Lakes–Victoria are working very hard with the ministry to say to them what is wrong. But the children are the people who are suffering here. The minister is responsible for providing the children in my riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock with the best services available. When they're the only municipality to get zero—

Interjection.

Ms. Scott: We asked you to look at that, to say you are the minister and the children need the services, and it's disappointing that the minister hasn't acted more strongly on that. I ask her again today. I've asked the Auditor General too. The children are what's important here. That is the bill we're debating. I need her to be an advocate for the children of this riding, because this legislation is not through yet and it's three years late.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I want to congratulate the member for making a number of interesting comments in regard to the legislation.

I want to also say, because I represent, as does everybody here, a distinct part of the province of Ontario, that in my case there are a lot of aboriginal families. The minister will well know, because we've dealt with a number of issues together in regard to the plight of aboriginal children when it comes to their contact with the children's aid system and the difficulty that many families have in working within that system, and one of the things that I'm looking for in this legislation is to make sure that we take into account the specific, special challenges that aboriginal children and their families are having to face, basically coming to terms with dealing with the children's aid system. We know that many of these families have had to deal with the effects of residential school. We know they're impoverished communities by and large. There are many, many challenges in aboriginal communities that we don't see in mainstream Ontario.

I would ask the minister—and I have not had a chance to read the legislation in detail. This is just but the first day, and I want you to rest assured that I'll be looking at it in detail, but we need to really do something in regard to giving some ability to this new office in some way, shape or form to basically have a section that deals specifically with aboriginal children. I believe it should be aboriginally staffed because the person who has walked a mile in somebody's shoes normally understands that issue far more than others. Not that we're not well meaning; sometimes, culturally and from a language perspective we just don't get it. I think one of the things we need to look at in creating this particular position is a way to make sure that children who are in need of an advocate, somebody to look out for their best interests—that it's basically in tune with what children are having to go through in our aboriginal communities across Ontario.

So I look forward to the debate. I look forward to reading this in more detail, and I certainly look forward to the comments from the member, Andrea Horwath,

who's next to speak, because I'm sure she's going to have volumes to say on that particular issue as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nepean–Carleton, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. MacLeod: I want to say thank you very much to all of my colleagues who contributed to the debate.

To my colleague from Hamilton East: I know she really cares, as do all members in this Legislature, when it comes to children.

To the member from Timmins–James Bay: I appreciate your comments as well.

To the member from London North Centre: I know she's been a child advocate in her own right, and I certainly appreciate that.

And to my colleague in the Progressive Conservative Party from Haliburton–Victoria–Brock: I appreciate your comments and your frustration with trying to get the Best Start program in your riding. It's just not right that that's not happening.

Minister, I'm here in good faith, offering to work with you on this piece of legislation, but I get discouraged when my honourable colleague from Victoria–Haliburton–Brock stands up and makes a presentation and the entire time you're chastising her.

I think that in the spirit of co-operation on a bill that you're professing to be this important and one that myself and my colleague from the New Democrats are proposing to work together with you on, you have to meet us halfway. We can work on this together, and I'm proposing to do just that. We've done the research.

I see now that the Minister of Energy is just shaking his head. If that's not what—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms. MacLeod: Anyway, with the short period of time I've got left, the Progressive Conservative Party is here to listen, study, consult and participate. We have shown that today in our discussions.

I appreciate the opportunity to debate this piece of legislation. I'll listen with great interest as we proceed, and I do hope to see a lot of consultation on this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Horwath: About half of my leadoff speech is going to be done today and probably the other half tomorrow. I'm going to focus today more on how we got here, why we think that it's important that we finally have a bill in front of us. I'm going to talk a little bit about some of the situations or the reality facing the children of this province, some of which can be addressed through this new independent office of the child advocate, some of which may not be and is really only something that the government can commit to addressing, and then see how far I can get in some of the actual nitty-gritty recommendations that I want to bring to the table.

I want to start, first of all, by saying that it is absolutely the case that this bill is long, long overdue. In fact, members of this Legislature will know that even

before the McGuinty government took office here in the Legislature, Dalton McGuinty was talking about the need for an independent office of the child advocate; I'm talking back in the early months of 2003. We know that shortly after the Liberals took office, the then Minister of Children and Youth Services, Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, who in fact is from my community and represents the riding of Hamilton Mountain, was very quick to cobble together, under the pressure of a scrum, I believe, a plan, or an announcement at least, to make the office of the child advocate independent. I can't even remember what the exact date of that was. That was March 8, 2005.

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There have been many false starts since that time. All the while, myself and others have been urging the minister through question periods—the two different ministers, of course; the minister whom we have now as well as the previous minister—to get on with that activity, to get on with getting before this Legislature a bill that we could start looking at, start analyzing, start working with to try to make the independent office a reality here in Ontario. It is a really sad reflection of the lack of, I guess, prioritization of this issue that we are now at the eleventh hour of this government and we finally have a bill in front of us. I'm glad that it's finally here. I think everyone is. But I think it does reflect the lack of priority that this government gives to children and children's issues overall, to realize or acknowledge the fact that it is in the dying days of this government that we finally see this bill being tabled in the Legislature. I am going to go through some details—some more examples, I guess it is better to say—of this government's track record on children's issues. Nonetheless, we do have a bill in front of us.

It is unfortunately a bill that, notwithstanding the length of time we've had to wait for it, has not succeeded during that interim period, so really from July of 2003 through to March 2005, when the minister at the time first announced that it was imminent. I don't know how many times I asked the minister in this question period. It actually makes me laugh, because she's just so calm. Every time I asked her the question, "When is that bill coming?" she would say, "The member from Hamilton East, I assure you that this bill is imminent." Well, finally we are here, making history in the province of Ontario, which again is a good thing. But the imminence unfortunately was a long time in coming. I don't think "imminent" was the right word.

Interjection.

Ms. Horwath: Imminent? I think it might be, but you never know. It's coming; it's imminent. Okay.

Nonetheless, the reality is that the bill, notwithstanding how long it took—and again, there is some speculation that this is not the first iteration of this bill. In fact, as a result of some of the—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Consultation.

Ms. Horwath: No, I wouldn't call it consultation. Some of the feedback that the minister has received over

the last little while has led to a couple of iterations of this bill.

I guess the problem—and the member for Nepean—Carleton mentioned that in her remarks as well—the thing that continues to be problematic, at least in the process, is the lack of fulsome consultation even to this very day. I am not going to repeat the specifics around what has and hasn't been done or the critical pieces of lack of consultation that the member for Nepean—Carleton raised, because there is just no point. But suffice it to say that, notwithstanding the fact that this has been a priority of the McGuinty Liberals for four full years—mind you, only three and a half while they were in government—it has had woefully inadequate input particularly from young people and from other sectors of our community.

I know that my colleague Gilles Bisson raised the issue of First Nations communities, and I'm going to be talking about that as well. Unfortunately there is a bit of a problem, I think, in terms of the government's or the ministry's or somebody's ability to, willingness to, desire to, commitment to at the very least consult with First Nations communities, when we know for sure that aboriginal children are far, far overrepresented in situations where they are in care, when they have been removed from their families, when we know that statistically is the case in Ontario. It is absolutely unacceptable that we do not have full consultation with them, and in fact full reference in regard to their needs in the legislation, in the bill, an outline specifically set out quite clearly, a commitment to dealing with those families and those children. To do anything less is to simply ignore the sad reality of the experience of our children who are from First Nations communities. It's totally inappropriate that their voices have not in any way been reflected in the bill at all.

Speaking of voices, I was busily looking through the binder of bills that's underneath all of our chairs here, which is looking a little thin these days. You might not be able to see it from the camera, but in fact it's almost empty. Why is that? That's of course because we are getting near the end of this government's mandate. There isn't a lot more that's going to be accomplished or achieved in terms of legislation because the timetable simply won't allow it; time is running out.

It's interesting because one of the things that I noticed is that in some of the bills that are in that binder, in some of the pieces of legislation that I've seen come forward, there is time spent at the beginning of the bill, usually after the explanatory note, where there is a preamble, where there's a vision statement that talks about what it is that this piece of legislation is attempting to accomplish in the province of Ontario. It seems to me that an initiative as rare as the implementation of a new, independent officer of the Legislature, particularly the office of the child advocate, is so important that it warrants a bit of preamble, a bit of a historic outlook or reminder of why it is that we need to have an independent officer put forward, why we need to have a child advocate in the

province of Ontario. You would think there would be an opportunity to talk about why it is that we have a commitment, why it is that there is a desire for the voices of children to be heard and the need to have someone who is on the side of children in this province when it comes to the dealings they have with government organizations and agencies that purport to be meeting their needs but in fact, as we've seen so many times, tragically are not and are causing some significant problems and life difficulties for very, very vulnerable kids.

So I was a little bit disappointed—I guess that's the right word—to not see not only some kind of acknowledgment of the work that's been done so far, but some kind of framing of the expectations of what we want to get from this independent child advocate, what our expectations are and how it is that we're going to approach this particular kind of job or initiative, because you know what? Without these subtleties, without this descriptor attached to the bill, you can very easily look to the letter of the law and not be able to contextualize what the purpose is in the first place. Without that context, I think that you really not only don't do justice to the importance of this legislation and this office, but also you don't make that commitment in terms of your approach. I've heard quite clearly myself, personally as well as through the work that has been done by our current advocate, that that's an extremely important perspective to be reflected in the legislation—that that sets the tone, if you will, for what the business of the child advocate should be all about in the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, it's not in there.

It's not a difficult thing to do—in fact it's quite a simple thing to do—but I think it has a great deal of meaning, particularly if you take the perspective that this legislation is not for us but for them. It's not for the people here; it's for the children of Ontario. If you acknowledge that, then perhaps the thing you need to do is explain to them, or explain for them, with them or have their voice in that very preamble, because from my perspective at least, that's what will set a tone for the future of the office: having a preamble that is actually more reflective of the voice of children. It's unfortunate that it's not there, but I don't think it's too late. I really don't think it's too late to put together some kind of a preamble that focuses on the orientation of this legislation and this effort to be one reflecting the voice of children and their needs.

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To do so in plain language, language that's understandable by young people, is another thing that I would suggest. Again, we are at second reading of this bill. We do have to go to committee. There is an opportunity to do that. I think if we're going to do that, which I would recommend, then we should really make the effort to do that in language that's understandable and usable and that actually reflects the young people of the province of Ontario, because I think this is their legislation more than anybody else's.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about a little bit in the first part of my remarks was, the minister in her remarks—and I'm going to pick up on that, because I think it was an important reflection or indicator of the way that this ministry and this minister, unfortunately, seem to tackle the issues of First Nations communities. The minister talked about her proud record of implementing, for example, Bill 210 and how she thought that she had done such a very great job with that piece of legislation. In fact, interestingly, you might recall that one of the amendments that I brought to Bill 210—in the discussion, anyway, at committee—was the independence of the child advocate. Now, having said that, I realize that a small amendment to Bill 210 certainly wasn't enough in terms of creating an office of the child advocate. But when I was speaking earlier about the various points in time over the last four years where we've raised this issue, that was another opportunity during the discussion of Bill 210 to raise the issue of a lack of an independent child advocate in the province.

Having said that, people who participated in that process might recall—and even people who didn't—but I speak particularly to First Nations communities who participated or were trying to participate and in fact forced the minister to get their voice on the table. They were given some pretty clear promises by the minister. They were quite unhappy with the lack of consultation with First Nations communities. They were stunned that they could be so overlooked in terms of the consultation process. Having spoken to the minister, her claim was that she had done all kinds of consultations; she had met this person, this person and that person. But again, I guess it's a matter of your perspective. If your perspective is, "I'm going through the motions. I'm having meetings so that I can say I did," then the meetings happened. But if you're the leaders of various First Nations communities and you're the ones wanting to have a voice and have an important thing to say about, for example, customary care, then their experience wasn't that they had a voice.

So again, that consultation did not occur in any appropriate way. When we got to the clause-by-clause discussions, or even before that, when we got to the hearings, it started to come out on the table. So the bill is drafted, we're in the hearings and all of the sudden First Nations communities are saying, "Well, hold on. We didn't even get consulted about this legislation, at least not in the way that we consider consultation to have occurred." So as a result, I believe the minister took an opportunity and directed the staff to spend some time and try to figure out how to let this go forward, how to prevent the whole thing from getting mired down in a problem around whether or not there had been consultation. So some promises were made, particularly about regulations around customary care. Those promises were made to First Nations communities that in fact their issues would be dealt with. "Just trust us." Just trust the government that they were not going to do anything untoward and that they wouldn't do anything like implement any regulations or any framework around what

customary care was going to look like and how that was going to be realized in the province of Ontario. "Trust us; it's not going to be a problem. Just let this go through. You have our word that it's going to go forward. And then, once it goes forward, once the bill is done, we're going to spend some time on making sure that all of your issues are addressed and you have a model that you can support."

As it turns out, here we are, quite some time since the bill came into force—and not so long ago I spent some time with some leaders in the First Nations communities who told me that in fact a bit of renegeing went on, that nobody bothered to take the time to put that framework together, that nobody bothered to re-consult or to reconsider or to even pick up the phone and say, "Okay, it's time for us to start hammering out these details." No. To this very day, those communities, those peoples, are feeling pretty betrayed by their experience in terms of the commitments that the minister made to them and didn't follow through on. I'm telling you, I'm really concerned. I'm concerned because I truly believe that the same minister, the same ministry and the same staff are about to create the same mistake, and I don't think that's acceptable.

What's that saying? "Fool me once: Shame on me. Fool me twice: Shame on you," or however that goes. "Fool me once: Shame on you. Fool me twice: Shame on me." Well, shame on you. Shame on you that this extremely important piece of legislation does not include any reference, any regard, any comments, any acknowledgement of the fact that the greatest number of children in care, proportionately, in the province of Ontario are children from First Nations communities, and yet not a word, not a commitment, not a side glance, not an acknowledgement—nothing. I think that's something that is sorely lacking in this bill.

I'm extremely hopeful that when it comes time to put some amendments on the table or to go through a hearings process that might get some of those voices to the table, we can perhaps visit the north and talk to some of those communities whose children are, unfortunately, the ones who often are being removed from their families and having the intervention of the state, if you want to call it that. That's a big problem. It's a big issue. I only hope that we can get at it one way or another. If we can't get at it through the hearings process, then some kind of commitment to make that happen I think is absolutely in order. So I await the minister's response to that request or that initiative to see what we can do in that regard.

That's one of the issues that reflect the process or the procedural problems or the lack of consultation—just this whole sense that they still haven't figured out how to make that happen in a way that actually makes people feel heard and feel valued in terms of the input process. Interestingly enough, how are we going to assure children that they are being heard, that they are being believed and that they are being valued if we can't even do it in the consultation process of putting the legislation

together? It's a little bit of a warning bell that goes off in my mind, and it's concerning.

So we ask, why is it that children in this province need to have an independent child advocate? I've just explained the one reason straight out, the whole lack of attention that this minister had in terms of the drafting of legislation for Bill 210, but there are many, many other pieces that make it not surprising that this bill has come at the 11th hour.

I want to spend a very few minutes—I'm probably not going to talk about any of this stuff the next time I have a chance to talk about the bill, because I'm going to be a little more specific—to take a look at the government's record on children's issues. I have to say that it's been disappointing. I think "disappointing" is a mild word, but it is absolutely a disappointment at every turn: a disappointment that this bill took so long to get here, a disappointment in the lack of consultation around this bill, a disappointment that it wasn't a higher priority at the cabinet table. That's all true.

But when you look at just what has happened recently in terms of even last week, when one of the strongest advocates in this province—not to step on the toes of Ms. Finlay, because of course she is a wonderful advocate and her staff do a great job and she does a great job, but I'm speaking particularly about one of my colleagues here in the Legislature, and that's Shelley Martel, the member for Nickel Belt, and the advocacy work she has done on the autism file.

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Just last week, instead of putting effort and attention and dollars and investment into, for example, treatment for kids, the government decided to pretty much name Ms. Martel in a muzzle suit so that she can't get the information she would like to get in terms of what the government is spending in its ongoing court cases against the families of children who were cut off from IBI therapy. You begin to wonder where the priority of this government is. It's certainly not with children; it seems to be with preventing information from coming forward; it seems to be with making sure that you have to go through a number of hoops and climb a number of mountains before you can get some of the most basic information on the table about where the government is spending its money. That's only the most recent kind of reflection or the most recent incident that occurred.

But people will be very aware—and I don't think this is going to change when the budget comes in a couple of days. Do you know what? It will be a wonderful surprise if it does change. But when you look at the promises this government made to children, particularly to families with children more broadly, you will see that it has been backtrack after failure after backtrack after failure.

The thing that's most disturbing to me is that the Campaign 2000 people were here in the Legislature not too long ago and indicated quite clearly in the most recent analysis they've done that the children of this province are in fact worse off than they were four years

ago when this government came into power. What that tells me in kind of an aggregate way is that this government has really done very little to effect positive change, particularly for low-income children in this province, and that's just unacceptable. A child who lives for four more years in poverty has lost four more years of possible opportunity, has lost four more years of opportunity to excel in school and to be socially included in their community and to be healthy physically. All of these things are simply not going to happen if the children in this province continue to live in poverty.

Just the devastation that families living in desperate poverty experience day to day is something that I would hope every member of this Legislature would at least have an opportunity to see or a commitment to finding out what that looks like, because I can tell you that the part of the province that I represent is one of the lowest-income ridings in the entire province. It's not a pleasant thing; it's not a happy thing. In fact, it's a disgusting thing to see the kinds of conditions that these families have to live in. It is absolutely horrifying and inappropriate and it's just wrong that this government has, in four years, not had any effect whatsoever and that in fact the lot of children in the lowest-income brackets in this province continue to lose ground.

Maybe that's not something specifically a child advocate is going to be looking at, although I have to say that there are many pieces to that poverty puzzle that continue to be ignored by the McGuinty Liberals, and it's just not acceptable. Every year that we ignore this problem is another year of children we're going to lose because they're just not ever going to be able to overcome those years of lack of opportunity, ill health and inability to learn and participate and create social relationships with each other or others of their peers because of the poverty they live in. It's absolutely unacceptable.

The other big, big failure of this government—and it's a failure for children more from the perspective of what we could be doing in terms of early learning in this province, and we're not doing it. I know the government makes announcements here and there, they're doing this, they're doing that, but the bottom line is, we simply do not have the kind of child care system in the province of Ontario that we should have, that we could have, that we need to have.

This government was very interested in all of that not too long ago, until the Conservative government of the day decided they were going to pull back on their commitment, and that gave this government a real good curtain to hide behind. They could hide behind the curtain, they could blame it all on Harper and nobody here would have to say, "We've abandoned our principles," or, "We've abandoned our commitments to the child care system in the province of Ontario." I have to tell you, if Quebec can do it, darn it, Ontario can do it too. I guess it is because, once again, children's issues just keep falling off the cabinet table. I have to congratulate the minister to finally get this legislation

here, at the eleventh hour. Gee, it must be really tough when her colleagues sit around the cabinet table and nobody gives a darn that the kids in this province are getting poorer by the year and nobody gives a darn about what that's going to do to future generations of communities. I guess it's a big victory that this long-awaited legislation is finally on the table.

I know that my colleague from Nepean–Carleton spoke about the issue of children's mental health. Again, here's another one. I know the minister says, "We've invested \$10 million in children's treatment centres." The part that she doesn't say is that when you talk to those people, they're going to tell you that in fact it has not taken 100% of the waiting list down; in fact, it has taken most but not all of the waiting list down, and then unfortunately what has continued to happen in that sector is, over time, because they have been so starved for investment—and I would agree with anybody who criticizes former governments for not having kept up with investment in those sectors. But people from that sector will tell you that because of the lack of funding, because they've been withering on the vine for so long, the way that many of these organizations have made ends meet is by diluting their services, stretching the dollars. Lots of those organizations are run by independent boards of directors who sit and make policy and make decisions about how the service gets provided. In many

cases, rather than saying no to kids, these organizations say, "What we're going to do is stretch those dollars. We're going to reduce the funding for Jane so that Jenny can get a little bit of funding. So Jane can't have the 10 hours a week that she's supposed to have, because we can't afford to do that and not help Jenny, so now we're only going to give Jane five hours and we're going to give Jenny five hours, even though Jenny needed 15 and Jane was already getting 10." Do you see what's happening there? That whole sector is in an absolute mess. Notwithstanding that there was some base funding applied to that sector, it still has significant challenges.

The other big one is children's mental health. I've heard horror stories about children who are facing absolute crisis and cannot get the services. I know I'm out of time, Mr. Speaker. I look toward to speaking about this again. I have two minutes? I will be speaking about this again tomorrow night, but I think the focus on children's issues needs to come back to the top of the agenda. It's unfortunate that this government has squandered so much of its mandate and not fulfilled a lot of the promises they had made around children in this province. It is simply unacceptable.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Tuesday, March 20.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Ajax	
Ferreira, Paul (ND)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de l'Énergie
Fonseca, Peter (L)	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est	
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent Essex	
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Klees, Frank (PC)	Oak Ridges	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldeep (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glenarry–Prescott–Russell	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and to the Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce et au ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Environnement
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	Chief government whip / whip en chef du gouvernement
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
Marsales, Judy (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	
Martel, Shelley (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services and minister responsible for women's issues / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires et ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
McMeekin, Ted (L)	Ancaster–Dundas– Flamborough–Aldershot	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Éducation
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa–Orléans	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Transports
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	Chief opposition whip / whip en chef de l'opposition
Milloy, John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / adjointe parlementaire au ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)	Stoney Creek	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture and minister responsible for francophone affairs / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Culture et ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Munro, Julia (PC)	York North / York-Nord	Deputy opposition whip / whip adjoint de l'opposition Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Richesses naturelles et ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services (Disabilities) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires (Personnes handicapées)
Parsons, Ernie (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Patten, Richard (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Premier / adjoint parlementaire au premier ministre
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Peterson, Tim (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York / Beaches–York-Est	Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Racco, Mario G. (L)	Thornhill	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Travail
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Rural Affairs) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Affaires rurales)
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House leader / leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph–Wellington	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de l'Éducation
Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Burlington	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Victoria–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Housing) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Logement)
Smith, Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Lanark–Carleton	
Tabuns, Peter (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)	Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford	Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tory, John (PC)	Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey	Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Agriculture and Food) / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Agriculture et Alimentation)
Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Wilkinson, John (L)	Perth–Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Research and Innovation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Deputy opposition House leader / leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General / adjoint parlementaire au procureur général

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Ces listes figurent dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et du premier lundi de chaque mois. Par contre, une liste des circonscriptions paraît si l'espace est disponible.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 20 March 2007

Mardi 20 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Acting Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 20 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 20 mars 2007

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I have a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2007 and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean–Carleton): Yesterday was an historic day in this Legislature. For the first time in our history, this Legislature was composed of 25% women, thanks to my colleague from Burlington, Joyce Savoline, as well as the other female members of this Legislature. That is something we can all be proud of on all sides of this Legislature. In particular, as a Progressive Conservative MPP I'm pleased that this is yet another first for Ontario women.

The PC Party of Ontario had the first female Deputy Premier in Bette Stephenson, and we had the first female finance minister in Janet Ecker. There is still a long way to go until we really, truly reach a reflective gender balance in this Legislature, but we are making progress. As a young mom, I was proud to be able to run for John Tory, and I am pleased to now be in a position to help other young women in this province run for office, particularly for this Legislature. It is time that we all in this Legislature become proactive. We need to make the necessary changes to this institution to make it more family friendly and more appealing to women. We should strive to ensure that Joyce Savoline's historic feat in becoming the first female to break the 25% glass ceiling in Ontario politics is just the start in balancing the gender gap.

The time for rhetoric has passed, and the time for action is now to make sure this Legislature is more attractive to members of all kinds. Male, female, young

and old, I implore my colleagues on all sides to take Joyce's experiences and the experiences of all members to heart in order to make this institution truly reflective of the Ontarians we represent.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): Last fall my bill, the living wage bill, passed second reading demanding a \$10 minimum wage for the poorest of our working families. This government refused to allow me committee time or to bring the bill back for third reading. Unlike their own pay raise, which passed in eight days, Ontario's poorest families are told to wait yet again.

Since then, fuelled by the 74% of Canadians who demand action, we have held forums and travelled the province and won a by-election, all fuelled by the huge movement to alleviate the plight of the working poor. Thousands of e-mails pour into Queen's Park, the Toronto Star has come out twice in favour of my bill and the theme of the International Women's Day march was the \$10 minimum wage.

Over 90 economists, as well as TABIA, the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, across Canada have denounced the fear tactics of this government, claiming a \$10 minimum wage would help small business, help the economy and not lead to a loss of jobs. Toronto and York Region Labour Council as well as the CLC all have supported this.

We don't want this in four years, we don't want this in three years, we don't want this in two years, we need this now. The chant was this: "What do we want?" "Ten dollars." "When do we want it?" "An hour."

CANADIAN ECO-RUBBER

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): It's an honour to rise today at the start of a new session of government to acknowledge yet another outstanding group in my riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale.

During the break, I had the privilege to visit and tour the Canadian Eco-Rubber facility in my riding, along with fellow Oakville member Kevin Flynn. The team at Canadian Eco-Rubber works hard to provide an environmentally friendly service by recycling tires by converting them into crumb rubber. This is a great example of one of many companies within my riding of Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale that stand out and contribute to the community.

Crumb rubber can be used for many purposes, such as artificial grass, asphalt and industrial applications. This facility has the capacity to convert about 1.5 million waste tires per year into usable crumb rubber and potentially bring this material back to the community as consumer products.

The Canadian Eco-Rubber plant exemplifies innovation in Ontario. Facilities such as this one that work hard to do a good service for Ontario's environment need to be recognized for their efforts and contributions. I'm proud of the service that they're providing Ontarians right here in my own riding.

Having had the opportunity to personally visit their plant, I can honestly say their contributions and efforts help our environment, not only by recycling tires into crumb rubber but also by turning them into usable consumer products. Both my riding and Ontario are better because of them. I'd like to thank them again for their hard work.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby-Ajax): Yesterday, in response to a question from my colleague regarding recent directives issued to cut vital services at Lakeridge Health, I was shocked to hear that the minister's response included a self-congratulatory endorsement of his government's record with respect to health care funding in Durham region. I can assure the minister that on this file the last thing his government deserves is congratulations.

During my by-election less than one year ago, the primary concern I heard from community residents was that they felt ignored by this government with respect to health care. That's why I introduced a private member's resolution that would have seen funding for Durham region immediately increased to the provincial average. Because your government defeated my resolution, however, the funding gap that exists between Durham region and the rest of Ontario has grown and stands at a whopping \$339 million for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

On top of that, you've decided to make these devastating cuts.

1340

Tonight, I will be attending a town hall meeting along with other Durham MPPs to discuss your government's recent decision to cut children's mental health, addiction and crisis intervention services at Lakeridge Health. The minister sees no problem with transferring current services to local community agencies; however, these agencies are already working hard each and every day to treat the line-up of patients already at their doorsteps.

Moreover, the fact of the matter is that certain services exist at Lakeridge that are not available elsewhere. Vital services such as treatment up to the age of 19, acute care facilities and immediate access to a psychiatrist make Lakeridge unique among partners. I would strongly urge the minister to reconsider this disastrous decision.

BRAMPTON HOSPITAL

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise today in the House to applaud the generosity of Doug Munro, his wife, Barbara, and his mother, Carole, for their generous donation of \$1 million towards the new Brampton Civic Hospital. This donation was made through the Graham Munro Charitable Foundation. It is the single largest donation by the foundation and is another example of how the Munro family and Maritime-Ontario Freight Lines Ltd. answer the call of my community time and time again.

As a leader in the trucking and transportation industry, the corporation donates a remarkable 20% of its annual profits to the foundation in support of local charities such as Brampton Safe City and other charitable causes across this province. The Munro family's level of commitment and generosity to Brampton epitomizes the finest qualities of philanthropy.

Hospitals are the cornerstones of our community, and Brampton is in the middle of a transformation. I'd take this opportunity to recognize Anne Randall and the William Osler Health Centre Foundation for their unwavering commitment to the "Here for you ... caring for you" campaign, which is the largest fundraising initiative of any community hospital currently being undertaken. Staff and volunteers have assisted in organizing countless dinners, car washes, radiothons, charity concerts and even a 24-hour soccer game.

When the new Brampton Civic Hospital opens its doors later this year, revealing a world-class hospital, it will be in no small measure due to the generosity of the Munros. I'd like to thank the Munro family for their generosity and leadership.

NOWRUZ

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I rise in the House today to wish a very happy new year to all Persians in Ontario, as well as in the rest of Canada, on this special day of Nowruz. Nowruz, meaning "new day," is a festival celebrated with friends and family who together pray for good luck in the new year. It is celebrated worldwide by countries that were at one time either territories of or influenced by the Persian empire, such as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and many others.

Preparations for Nowruz begin in the last month of winter in the Persian solar calendar with a large spring cleaning of homes, the purchase of new clothes to wear for the new year and the purchase of flowers. Persians, irrespective of religion or ethnic affiliation, have been celebrating Nowruz for at least 2,500 years. Nowruz is not only the celebration of a new year but it's also a celebration of rebirth, renewal and hope.

Nearly 150,000 Persians have come to live in our province and enjoy new beginnings. I encourage the members of this Legislature to join me in wishing a happy new year to all of those who are celebrating Nowruz, the celebration of new beginnings.

I also want to let you know that there are many members of the Persian community here today in the House, as you can see, who have come to celebrate because Minister Colle has organized a formal event. I want to say thank you to them for coming here to see us today and celebrate. Again, happy new year. Happy Nowruz.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I rise to recognize the Minister of Education as she takes her rightful place in the renowned Dalton McGuinty Liberal promise-breakers club. The club is open to those who are unable to keep their stated promises to the people of Ontario.

During the last election campaign, Dalton McGuinty said that the hard cap on class sizes was "the single most important plank" in his policy platform. Yesterday, in the face of growing class sizes across the province, with many classrooms with up to three grades per room, the education minister simply abandoned the plank altogether.

Other examples of how the Dalton McGuinty Liberals keep their education promises McGuinty-style include: fixing the funding formula by slashing school budgets and raiding special education funding to balance their books; failing to keep their own deadline on standardized tests and then moving it into the next decade; honouring their moratorium on school closures by closing 150 schools; keeping children safe at schools with increasingly dangerous levels of lack of supervision, as the Ontario Principals' Council itself recently noted.

I could go on, but rest assured the education minister has already more than earned her rightful place at the head of the class in the Dalton McGuinty Liberal promise-breakers club. On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I convey to the minister her well-earned designation as the newest member of the Dalton McGuinty promise-breakers club—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Order.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): In the business world that both I and the Leader of the Opposition come from, the rules are very simple: If you disclose only some of the facts of a business transaction, you get sued; and if, heaven forbid, you get sued and end up in court, the law says you must swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

I want to share with the transitory member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey the whole truth. Yesterday, I contacted Andrew Williams, the CEO of the Huron–Perth Healthcare Alliance. I raised with him John Tory's statement that the wait time for knee replacement surgery at Stratford General Hospital was 525 days.

I cannot adequately share with you how deeply disappointed the wonderful and caring health care professionals in my hometown were to hear that once again the Leader of the Opposition did not take the time to state all of the facts in this matter.

Andrew Williams has advised me that, based on the latest available numbers for the period August 2005 to January 2007, median wait times are down 135 days—37%; average wait times are down 163 days—41%; and finally, the 90th percentile wait times, which he cherry-picked yesterday, are down 250 days—32%.

I say to the member, this is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. If you come to Stratford and you repeat the allegations, the doctors, nurses and health care workers you insulted yesterday will run you out of town. If you would just be square with the people of Ontario and tell us how you plan to gut \$2.5 billion a year from health care—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Member for Nepean–Carleton.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): Since the Legislature last met this past December, the forestry sector has continued to face enormous challenges in northwestern Ontario. Most notably, the people of Nipigon lost 120 jobs overnight when their newly revitalized Multiply Forest Products mill burned down in a devastating fire on February 6.

Despite this tragedy, the community and the local mill ownership are determined to rebuild the mill and, while the costs have not yet been determined, I'm extremely grateful to Premier McGuinty and Minister Ramsay, the natural resources minister, for both speaking and meeting with Nipigon Mayor Richard Harvey and confirming that our government will provide whatever assistance it can to see this operation truly rise from the ashes.

If any good can come from such a dire circumstance, it will likely centre around the need for Multiply to maintain its production line, which, as a result, could help bring about the reopening of Longlac Wood Industries in Greenstone. Much work and some financial assistance will be required to make this happen, so I will use this opportunity today to publicly call on our government to continue to work closely with LWI to see that happen.

On a more sombre note, the Norampac mill in Red Rock remains indefinitely shut down. While the community is moving aggressively forward with new and diversified economic plans, which will be discussed at a public meeting tomorrow, I still believe we must do everything we can to help get the operation reopened. Government incentives must be part of any revival, but it will also take a commitment from the ownership, the community and other forestry operations in the northwest to see this happen.

I will do everything I can to bring this about as a member of the government as we continue to aggressively tackle the forestry crisis in northwestern Ontario.

1350

VISITORS

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education):

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I beg the indulgence of the House to introduce three generations of my family, who join me here today: my niece, Elizabeth Hodgson; my sister, Marie Hodgson; my daughter, Maggie Cowperthwaite; and my father, who practised medicine in Richmond Hill for 40 years, John Wynne, who turns 81 today.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like members to join me in welcoming my special guest, Ellen Anderson, the mayor of the beautiful town of Blue Mountain in gorgeous Grey county.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like the House to welcome Dianne Vanhie and her daughter Karlee, as they're here to observe their daughter and sister, Jenalle Vanhie, who is a page in this session. Also, Dianne is the proud mother of another page who served previously with us, Danielle Vanhie. Let's welcome them here today.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise today to introduce Tracy Nesbitt, who is a constituent in Beaches–East York, and Susan Preston. Both of these women are social workers from the Ontario Association of Social Workers, and they are here to watch the debate on Bill 171, the Health System Improvements Act.

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: In the gallery across the way, I'm delighted to recognize a good friend, the former deputy mayor and former mayor of the city of Ottawa, who served with me on council for six years: Allan Higdon from the great riding of Ottawa South. Welcome.

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to welcome to the Legislature the students of St. Jerome School, their vice-principal and their teachers. They're all sitting up here. I just want to welcome them to the Legislature.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg the indulgence of the House to permit the pages to assemble for introduction. We have with us to this session:

Emma Ash from Perth–Middlesex; Alex Don from Oakville; Cody Fisher from Mississauga South; Craig Gilchrist from Eglinton–Lawrence; Ryan Goralczyk from Leeds–Grenville; Sarah Hampton from Nickel Belt; Ashley Heath from Peterborough; Thomas Hitchens from

London–Fanshawe; Jordan Lee from St. Paul's; Hayley Levine from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot; Katrina Malinski from Sudbury; Alistair Murray from Markham; Alanna Newman from Scarborough Southwest; David Patterson from Brampton West–Mississauga; Carolyn Peralta from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge; Calla Pfrimmer from Parry Sound–Muskoka; Jacob Pitre from Windsor–St. Clair; Alex Simakov from Thornhill; Alyssa Surani from Oak Ridges; and Jenalle Vanhie from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Applause.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LES ESPÈCES EN VOIE
DE DISPARITION

Mr. Ramsay moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 184, An Act to protect species at risk and to make related changes to other Acts / Projet de loi 184, Loi visant à protéger les espèces en péril et à apporter des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The minister may wish to make a brief statement?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I will reserve my remarks for ministers' statements.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I know members of the House have been waiting for this with anticipation, especially the member for Niagara Centre.

I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 20, 2007, for the purpose of considering government business, despite the fact that the New Jersey Devils are playing the Leafs tonight.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1356 to 1401.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Balkissoon, Bas	Dombrowsky, Leona	Oraziotti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Duguid, Brad	Patten, Richard
Bountrogianni, Marie	Duncan, Dwight	Peters, Steve
Bradley, James J.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peterson, Tim
Broten, Laurel C.	Fonseca, Peter	Pupatello, Sandra
Brownell, Jim	Gravelle, Michael	Racco, Mario G.
Bryant, Michael	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Cansfield, Donna H.	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Runciman, Robert W.
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
Elliott, Christine	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
Ferreira, Paul	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tabuns, Peter
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Tascona, Joseph N.
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	Tory, John
Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John	Wilson, Jim
Klees, Frank	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Yakabuski, John

The Acting Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 48; the nays are 27.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ENDANGERED SPECIES ESPÈCES MENACÉES

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): In May 2006, this government launched an extensive public review of the province's Endangered Species Act with the goal of updating and strengthening the legislation that protects Ontario's native species at risk and their habitats.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today to introduce new legislation that would, if passed, not only achieve that goal, but would make Ontario a North American leader in species protection and recovery.

Compared to an existing act, the new Endangered Species Act, 2007, that I'm introducing today would provide significantly broader and more effective provisions for protecting species at risk and their habitats. The proposed legislation also includes a stronger commitment to species recovery, more support for groups and individuals who voluntarily participate in stewardship activities to protect essential habitat and green space and stronger enforcement provisions.

From the boreal to the Carolinian forests, from tundra to wetland to tall grass prairie, Ontario is blessed with a

tremendous variety of natural habitats. These habitats, in turn, support more than 30,000 species of equal variety.

The people of Ontario deserve the benefits that come from conserving this unique natural heritage and rich biodiversity. Les habitants de l'Ontario méritent que l'on conserve ce patrimoine naturel unique qui renferme une biodiversité si grande.

Right now, there are more than 175 species identified on the Species at Risk in Ontario list. We estimate that this may grow, on average, by six new species per year.

If passed, the Endangered Species Act, 2007, would provide an important tool to help reverse the rate of species decline and ensure that future Ontarians enjoy the benefits of a healthy, diverse natural environment.

It is important to note that the legislation I'm introducing today is the result of extensive public consultation. Il est important de noter que ce projet de loi est le fruit d'une vaste consultation publique.

This was the first time since the Endangered Species Act was passed in 1971 that our laws protecting species at risk have undergone a thought review. I'm pleased to report that the individuals, organizations, partners, stakeholders and aboriginal communities we heard from during the consultation strongly supported improved species at risk legislation. I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly thank everyone who participated.

We considered all comments in drafting the new legislation and will provide a further opportunity for review and comment upon introduction. A wide range of stakeholders, including land developers, environmentalists, rural communities, fish and wildlife enthusiasts, municipalities and resource industry sectors also met with ministry staff to discuss ideas to propose legislative changes. A separate process involving consultation with aboriginal communities and organizations is ongoing at this time. Une procédure de consultation séparée auprès des collectivités et des organisations autochtones est en cours en ce moment.

I also want to publicly acknowledge and thank the members of the Endangered Species Act Review Advisory Panel. This panel was made up of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds with experience and expertise related to species at risk and recovery planning. Their input and assistance was most valuable. I believe we have succeeded in developing legislation that will offer optimum protection for Ontario species at risk while at the same time supporting the overall social and economic well-being of the province. Je crois que nous avons réussi à élaborer une loi qui protégera les espèces en péril, tout en appuyant le bien-être économique et social de la province.

We know that broader legislation on its own is not enough to achieve our goals. The proposed legislation is just one component of the ministry's comprehensive three-part approach to species protection and recovery. The other two components are programs and policies to fully implement the legislation and enhance stewardship programs. We propose to back up our commitment to enhance stewardship with the funding of \$18 million

over four years to support public stewardship efforts protecting essential habitat and green space.

Many of the species that need protection are found on private land, making voluntary stewardship activities essential to achieving any kind of success in reversing the rate of species in decline that is now happening in Ontario.

Much has changed in our province since the Endangered Species Act was introduced 36 years ago. As in the rest of the world, climate change, population growth and urbanization have taken a toll on our natural environment. In response to these ongoing challenges, we all share a commitment to future generations to work harder to improve our air and water quality, to protect important natural features and habitats and to sustain Ontario's amazing wealth of biodiversity.

The proposed legislation we are introducing today is one more way this government is working with the people of Ontario to meet that commitment.

1410

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
FISCAL POLICIES
POLITIQUES FISCALES
FÉDÉRALES-PROVINCIALES

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I'm honoured to rise in this House today and speak about an important issue: fairness—fairness for all Canadians, including those in Ontario.

I remind my colleagues that in June 2006, members of this House voted unanimously in support of a resolution calling on the federal government to treat all Canadians fairly. And for more than two years, the Premier, my colleagues and I have been leading Ontario's campaign for fairness, highlighting unfair federal funding practices in key areas such as post-secondary education, health care, infrastructure and job training.

Under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, we have called on the federal government to provide Ontario's fair share of funding for the services Ontarians value most. People from across the province have supported our campaign and spoken out in support of fairness. The Premier and I appreciate the efforts of business, labour, non-profit, public sector and municipal leaders who have supported our efforts with the federal government. We appreciate the resolutions of support from organizations and municipalities across the province. And most of all, we appreciate the support of individual Ontarians from across the province who spoke out, learned about the issue and sent letters of support to their federal MPs.

Nous avons vu hier que la campagne de l'Ontario en matière d'équité a entraîné des résultats concrets pour la population de l'Ontario. Le budget fédéral d'hier est un grand pas en avant pour la campagne de l'équité que mène le premier ministre McGuinty pour la population de l'Ontario.

We welcome the proposed federal working income tax benefit, which will support people with low incomes, and we are pleased to see Ottawa's proposal on the capital cost allowance as a way of helping hard-hit manufacturers. I'm also pleased to say that we can put the Canada-Ontario agreement behind us and move forward in a positive manner.

Il est particulièrement encourageant de constater que le gouvernement fédéral s'engage à verser les transferts selon un montant égal par habitant dans l'avenir. Le gouvernement fédéral a également adopté des mesures immédiates pour rétablir l'équité dans les paiements du transfert canadien en matière de programmes sociaux ainsi que d'autres transferts fédéraux. Il s'agit de la principale revendication de la campagne du premier ministre McGuinty pour l'équité.

Ces étapes importantes vers l'équité sont de véritables victoires pour la population de l'Ontario. Elles se sont concrétisées parce que le premier ministre McGuinty n'a pas craint de défendre les intérêts de l'Ontario et parce que notre campagne a bénéficié d'un grand appui de la part des Ontariennes et Ontariens.

However, I feel it is my duty to highlight the fact that some of Ontario's key fairness concerns remain outstanding. Although the federal government has committed to treating Ontario fairly in the Canada health transfer, that fairness will not be introduced immediately. The federal government expects Ontarians to wait seven more years for our fair share of health care funding while the federal government shortchanges Ontarians by about \$700 million each year in this important transfer. This means less federal money for hospitals and the important health services that keep Ontarians healthy.

We were also hoping for a clear commitment on federal funding for infrastructure. Although the commitment to funding for the Windsor border crossing is a good step forward, we will need to see more details on how infrastructure spending will be distributed before we can know for certain what this will mean for Ontario.

This is why the Premier, my colleagues and I will continue to speak out for fairness when necessary. Yesterday's federal budget represents an important step toward fairness, but more needs to be done. We have made real progress. We will continue to defend Ontario's interests in the federation. That is the only way to secure a strong and prosperous Ontario and a strong and prosperous Canada.

LA FRANCOPHONIE

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Je voudrais souhaiter à tous les Ontariens et les Ontariennes une excellente Journée internationale de la francophonie. Cette année, le thème de cette journée hautement symbolique pour les francophones est Vivre ensemble, différents. Ce thème reflète avec justesse la réalité canadienne, cette mosaïque où de nombreuses cultures et deux langues officielles cohabitent en harmonie.

If we can rise in this House and proclaim our commitment to the francophonie in Ontario, it is because our government has taken concrete measures to support it. Since taking office, the McGuinty government has shown strong support for the growth and development of the French language, not only as a language through which government services can be accessed, but also as a source of social, economic and cultural vitality.

The year 2006 marked the 20th anniversary of the French Language Services Act. To mark this occasion, we put in place a government-wide celebration program. The highlight of this program was the presentation of the first-ever Ontario Francophone Awards on November 20, by Premier McGuinty himself.

Lors de cette journée, le premier ministre a d'ailleurs annoncé l'intention du gouvernement de présenter un projet de loi, lequel, s'il est adopté, créerait le commissariat aux services en français.

Nous investissons 317 \$ millions en éducation de langue française aux niveaux élémentaire et secondaire, et plusieurs dizaines de millions de dollars en éducation postsecondaire.

Dans le domaine de la santé, le gouvernement McGuinty consacre 185 \$ millions à l'agrandissement de l'Hôpital Montfort à Ottawa.

Nous avons aussi investi plusieurs millions de dollars en prévention de et en lutte contre la violence familiale et la violence faite aux femmes.

De plus, nous venons tout juste de célébrer l'entrée en vigueur de la désignation de Brampton et de Callander en vertu de la Loi sur les services en français.

Et que dire de TFO, ce joyau de l'univers télévisuel franco-ontarien auquel le gouvernement McGuinty a décidé d'accorder la pleine gouvernance ?

Je suis convaincue que les Ontariens et les Ontariennes savent que l'engagement de notre gouvernement à l'égard de la francophonie ontarienne est fondamental.

En Ontario, la francophonie met l'accent sur l'avenir grâce aux Ontariens et aux Ontariennes francophones d'ici et d'ailleurs qui lui donnent vie.

And every day, the francophonie reinvents itself in the context of diversity. It forges its own unique identity, reflective of both Ontario and Canada, a blending of French Canada and the francophone world.

Elle se construit sur une histoire quatre fois centenaire et une culture bien vivante qui s'enrichit de l'apport de nouveaux arrivants francophones des cinq continents. Nos passés différents se rejoignent pour forger notre avenir commun ici en Ontario.

Je vous souhaite une Journée internationale de la francophonie à la hauteur de vos aspirations personnelles et collectives. Bonne Journée de la francophonie.

AMATEUR SPORT

SPORT AMATEUR

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to take a moment to commend the efforts of the Team Ontario athletes who represented us so proudly at

the just-completed Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse. They are excellent role models and an inspiration to us all.

I'm proud to report that for the eighth time in history and the first time in eight years, Team Ontario brought home the Canada Winter Games flag after amassing 310 points to win the top spot in the games. In total, Ontario won 112 medals, including gold in men's and women's hockey and ringette.

These games provided the opportunity to witness first-hand Ontario athleticism at its finest. The calibre of Ontario's athletes is second to none, and they are among the best in the world. Every Team Ontario athlete at the games represented the province with pride, and they were an inspiration to us all. I was very proud to represent Ontario at the opening ceremonies and see the hundreds of young athletes from our province walk in with their Ontario flags.

Speaking about inspiration, I'd like to draw the attention of this Legislative Assembly to the Sinclair family from Manotick. There are five members in the Sinclair family, and each one played a vital role in representing Ontario at the games. Jamie, 14, played lead on the women's curling team and won a gold medal. Neil, 16, was the skip of the boy's curling team and took home silver. Alex, 18, was selected to be part of the national arts program. Dad, Graham, was a coach for Neil's curling team; and mom, Suzanne, was one of the invaluable volunteers at the games.

Graham said it all for Ontario when, prior to leaving for Whitehorse, he expressed that he was "the proudest father in the world" and that "there's no greater satisfaction than to see your children achieve their dreams."

1420

We in the McGuinty government, like all Ontarians, experience the same sense of pride for our athletes, who are valuable role models for healthy, active living.

Voilà pourquoi l'appui accordé à nos athlètes demeurera une priorité pour le gouvernement de l'Ontario. Nos athlètes ont besoin de soutien à tous les niveaux—des entraîneurs, des bénévoles et des commanditaires—en bref, de tous ceux qui les aident à atteindre leurs buts. Le soutien de l'équipe de mission et des bénévoles a contribué pour beaucoup aux brillantes prestations couronnées de succès de l'équipe de l'Ontario aux Jeux d'hiver du Canada.

I'd like to congratulate Team Ontario's chef de mission, Blair McIntosh, and deputy chef de mission, Anita Comella, who are here today along with several others from the Sport Alliance of Ontario. These are the men and women who are representing us so well to make sure that the team performs at its peak. Let's give them and all of the chef's staff a round of applause. Congratulations to you, and we will be having a ceremony for all of the athletes in the near future.

Also in the Legislature, I should point out, we have the very proud father of a medallist in alpine skiing. Tim Peterson's daughter Krystyn won a gold, a silver and a bronze in alpine skiing. Congratulations.

I'd also like to highlight the performance of another young athlete, Josh Cameron, a 17-year-old boxer from Windsor who overcame serious injuries from a car crash to win gold. And we have brother and sister squash champions Brian and Carly Hong of Toronto. Each won a gold medal and said that the games had the feel of a mini Olympics.

J'aimerais également mentionner le skieur nordique Jesse Winter, de North Bay, qui a éclipsé ses rivaux lors de la dernière tranche de la course à relais 4 x 5 km hommes des épreuves de ski de fond pour aller rafler l'or pour son équipe.

One of the priorities of the Ministry of Health Promotion is to increase support for our high-performance athletes. In fact, this is one component of the McGuinty government's Active 2010 strategy for sport and physical activity. We want to build a healthier, stronger Ontario to give all Ontarians a chance to become more active and to achieve excellence, whether recreationally or competitively.

The Ontario government, through our ministry, is committed to amateur athletes. One example is our \$10-million Quest for Gold program that this year provides direct financial assistance to athletes from revenue generated from the Quest for Gold lottery.

Ontario's athletes have demonstrated their potential, their determination and their ability to perform under the pressure of intense competition. It is our responsibility to ensure that all athletes have the resources and the support they need to reach their full potential. We must work together, within our communities and at the provincial level, to develop our athletes starting in the playground and all the way up to the podium.

We are committed to supporting all of our athletes in their quest for excellence, and I want to congratulate all of them. I was extremely proud, as the minister responsible for sport and recreation, to be in Whitehorse to see the pride and the commitment of these young athletes, and I wish them the very best as they excel at the national and international level.

While I have the floor, on a personal note, I just want to also pass along my sincere thanks and congratulations to my alma mater's basketball team, the Carleton University Ravens, who for the fifth year in a row won the CIAU championship in Halifax. We welcome all the country's best basketball teams coming to Ottawa for the next three years. Congratulations to the Ravens and congratulations to our young athletes who did us so proud in Whitehorse, Yukon.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to respond to the Minister of Natural Resources in his statement on the Endangered Species Act, 2007. I'd like to remind the House that it was in 1971 that a Progressive Conservative government, under the leader-

ship of Bill Davis, introduced the first Endangered Species Act in Ontario and led the country with that state-of-the-art act. The minister at the time was René Brunelle, the lands and forests minister. That was actually the first year my father, Frank Miller, was elected to the Ontario Legislature.

The PC Party under the leadership of John Tory wants to see the act updated. But we do have some concerns. Recently I was in northwestern Ontario—that was just within the last month—and I met with municipal representatives and representatives of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association. I know the minister has talked a lot about consultation. Well, I can tell you that group were very concerned about the fact that they didn't know what was going on with the Endangered Species Act, and their message to us was that they want to see lots of consultation, not only in Toronto but right across northwestern and northeastern Ontario. So, to the minister, I think it's very important that there be lots of consultation on this bill.

The other point I'd like to make in the brief two minutes I have is that there needs to be adequate funding to implement this bill. Last week, I attended the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters conference and there I sat through a presentation from the past director of the Ministry of Natural Resources fish and wildlife program. He went through in detail how the fish and wildlife program needs some \$35 million extra to fulfill the Liberals' promise they made in the last election to properly fund the fish and wildlife program, just to do the sort of background work and inventory work that's necessary to know what's going on out there. I know the minister has talked about \$4.5 million a year as part of this program. Well, I would say that is not enough. So the two points I want to raise are: You need to consult—I know Dalton McGuinty wants to see something in a glossy election brochure that makes it look like he's doing something. I would say, take the time and get this right. Consult, and properly fund this new bill.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond to the statement by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Certainly I think all parties in this Legislature are pleased to see in this federal budget progress towards restoring fiscal fairness to Ontario and to Confederation. I do want to say too that it's absolutely amazing what can happen when a government keeps its campaign promises. Commendations to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and others for following through on their commitment to address the fiscal imbalance.

I do say that I suspect that a significant part of this has to do with the federal Conservative government keeping its campaign promises—and an election in Quebec—but I am very pleased that all three parties, including our own

led by John Tory, came together as part of a resolution here in the Legislature, joining together to push Ontario's strong case in Ottawa with success.

I want to note that more work does need to be done. A number of the transfers remain on a per jurisdiction as opposed to per capita basis, including the CHT and other transfers like infrastructure. But, nonetheless, we do recognize that the federal Conservative government has made significant steps forward. As I said, I am cautious. Giving more money to Dalton McGuinty is like giving keys to the liquor cabinet to teenagers and going away for the weekend. But, nonetheless, we'll keep an eye to make sure these funds are prudently invested.

LA FRANCOPHONIE

M. John Tory (Chef de l'opposition): C'est avec plaisir que je parle à cette Assemblée durant cette occasion très spéciale. Le 20 mars, c'est la journée mondiale de la francophonie. Cette journée commémore la signature du traité de Niamey en 1970. Ce traité a créé l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

Le Canada, comme membre de la francophonie, honore le rôle unique de la langue française et de la culture française dans ce pays. Partout au Canada, il y a des célébrations culturelles dans les communautés. Le Canada et notre province aussi sont enrichis par nos deux langues historiques et nous savons que les francophones ont joué un rôle très important dans la fondation et le développement de l'Ontario et du Canada.

L'Ontario est enrichi aussi par notre population francophone. L'Ontario compte plus de 550 000 Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes qui sont en fête aujourd'hui.

Je soutiens la francophonie. Je soutiens une langue et une communauté francophone forte et durable ici, et j'invite tous mes collègues à me joindre pour les féliciter.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins—Baie James): Moi aussi, comme membre du Nouveau Parti démocratique, et notre parti voulons célébrer cette Journée internationale de la francophonie. On sait que la francophonie est une communauté qui est forte, vive, et qui est toujours là pour être capable de travailler autour des drapeaux canadiens et ontariens, mais en le faisant comme francophones et en reconnaissant que l'on est un peuple dans ce pays qui reconnaît que les atouts et les dossiers sont importants.

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Des fois, cela devient de plus en plus difficile de s'épanouir en français, parce qu'on a besoin de plus de supports et de soutien de la part des gouvernements fédéral et provincial, et des fois cela n'est pas en place pour permettre à la communauté de s'épanouir au degré nécessaire. Mais je peux vous dire que la communauté est forte, la communauté sait ce qu'elle a besoin de faire, et on travaille dans cette direction de toujours nous assurer que, aujourd'hui, comme demain, la francophonie va être forte et vive ici en Ontario.

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL POLICIES

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora—Rainy River): I want to respond to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. I note from the minister's speech that she says that the federal budget yesterday delivers "real results for the people of Ontario." The Toronto Star says that the federal budget delivered \$1.1 billion of new money for Ontario. The minister also says that yesterday's federal budget, with \$1.1 billion of new federal money for Ontario, represents an important step forward.

Now what are Ontarians to make of this? Because it was just two years ago that the Premier rose in the Legislature, on May 9, 2005, and said, "I rise to inform this House and the people of Ontario ... a \$23-billion gap." What was \$23 billion two years ago under the McGuinty government has suddenly become something in the nature of \$1 billion. What are people across Ontario to think?

It wasn't just on May 9, but in October 2005 the Premier in this House said that the gap was \$23 billion. Suddenly, two years later, it's only in the nature of \$1.1 billion. My, what are people across Ontario to think?

But it's more interesting that that. The Premier is the MPP for Ottawa South. He says this is an important step forward. Someone named David McGuinty is the MP for Ottawa South. He says Ontario is getting hosed and every Liberal MP in Ontario is going to vote against this. Is this doublespeak? No, no, this is Newspeak. This is Liberal Newspeak.

I don't know what the people of Ontario are to do with this: \$23 billion one year, \$1 billion the next. The Premier says it's wonderful. The Premier's brother, who happens to share the same constituency, says Ontario is getting hosed. I think what it says is this: Liberals will say one thing one day, something else another day, depending on what you have to say to get some votes.

But I will take the McGuinty government at their word. I will take them at their word that they've gotten \$1.1 billion of new federal money. I guess this means that the McGuinty government has run out of excuses for continuing to claw back from the lowest-income children in this province \$250 million a year. I guess this means, or it should mean, that the McGuinty government has run out of excuses for taking federal money intended to build housing for low-income people and using that money for something else. I guess this means, or it should mean, that the McGuinty government has run out of excuses for promising to be a friend of autistic children and then spending millions of dollars of taxpayers' money fighting autistic children and their parents. I hope that this means—and it should mean—that the McGuinty government has run out of excuses for not shutting down the largest polluter, the largest generator of greenhouse gas in Ontario, the Nanticoke coal plant. After all, the McGuinty government has received \$573 million of new federal money to do just that.

So I congratulate the McGuinty government on this latest episode of doublespeak and Newspeak. Now let's see some action.

ORAL QUESTIONS

NATIVE LAND DISPUTE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Yesterday the Dalton McGuinty government offered the grand total of \$430,000 in compensation to Caledonia residents. In trying to deflect attention away from that completely inadequate offer, the Premier says the residents should call or write to the federal government for more help. He is suggesting that now because his own government didn't bother to discuss it with Ottawa before they put out this meagre offer to the residents.

Do you think this offer is adequate? And if you think that the federal government should be part of making an offer to the Caledonia residents, why didn't you bother to ask them before you made this inadequate offer yesterday?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): When it comes to interaction with the federal government on the subject of the community of Caledonia, I can advise this House that I have met with the Prime Minister on at least two occasions. I've also spoken with him over the telephone on at least another two separate occasions and we discussed at length some of the challenges that the community members there are having to grapple with.

What I think the members of the community of Caledonia would be interested in learning is, how many times has Mr. Tory picked up the phone and spoken with Prime Minister Harper, or how many times have members in his caucus picked up the phone or written letters? We'd be delighted to have copies of any correspondence that he might have sent to the Prime Minister or to the appropriate minister or to the member of the government who represents that particular riding. How many times have they acted in any way to intervene on behalf of the people of Caledonia with the federal government?

Mr. Tory: The fact is that it is a man by the name of Dalton McGuinty who is the Premier of Ontario, who has the responsibility to act on behalf of people who live in this province. The fact is, in every one of those meetings and every one of those phone calls, you, who now say the federal government should be part of your pathetic compensation offer, didn't even bother to ask them to take part in this compensation.

The reaction to the compensation has been swift and it has been negative, and rightly so. In the e-mails we get, people say, "I don't even believe this will come close to compensating the families most impacted." "The compensation ... is nowhere near what we all deserve." It's \$5.22 a day for the time these people have been affected while you've been doing nothing, and it's down to \$5.21 today. By two weeks from now it will be down to \$5 a day and by Canada Day, under the Dalton McGuinty style of leadership, it will still be going on and it will be \$4.11 a day. Do you think that kind of an offer of com-

pensation for what these people have been through is adequate? Yes or no? Is it adequate, \$4.11 a day by Canada Day?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I know the leader of the official opposition would not want to do an injustice to the issue itself, and he would want to account for all of the other various areas of support which we have provided to the community, whether it's in taking over the property in question, acquiring title to that land, whether it's providing supports to the business community, whether it's paying for signage or anything of that effect.

Again, the member opposite knows very well that this is the subject of a long-standing dispute between the Six Nations community and the government of Canada—the crown in the right of Canada. We stand in the middle. We are doing our very best to uphold public safety, to maintain law and order. Until the federal government comes to the table in a way that demonstrates their commitment to resolve this outstanding issue, this matter will continue. Again, I urge my friend opposite to get involved—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: Dalton McGuinty is the one who was just telling us he's had meetings with the Prime Minister. When it comes to one other thing you could have done, if you really feel they should participate in the compensation, you could have asked them, and you didn't do a thing.

When it comes to compensation, let's look at some of the other arrangements you have been prepared to enter into. We've got Tom Parkinson, the former CEO of Hydro One, who quit under a cloud. He quit his job and you paid him \$5 million to quit—\$5 million. We've got Jane Stewart, who maybe very ably represented the province of Ontario, but you managed to pay her \$330,000, almost as much as you're paying all of the residents of Caledonia who have been through all kinds of anguish on this.

I ask you again: If you've got the money to spend on that and to pay lawyers to go and fight the parents of autistic children, why can't you do better than five bucks a day for the people in Caledonia who, on your watch, have suffered?

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Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It's interesting to observe the vigour and the vitality put on display here when it comes to addressing me on these issues. But if you were to speak to the Six Nations community, if you were to speak to the people of Caledonia, they would tell you that this is an outstanding dispute between the Six Nations community and the federal government.

I also want to advise the House that on December 21, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing did in fact write to Ministers Prentice and Finley: "I strongly urge you to work with Ontario on a financial assistance package to local residents. I'm therefore asking that the federal government commit to matching Ontario's financial offer for residential assistance and provide a representative to help support the Caledonia community committee."

Again, I say to the leader of the official opposition, and I say this now on behalf of the people of Caledonia, when is he going to stand up for the people of Caledonia and make his case to the government of Canada?

The Speaker: New question? The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: My question is for the Premier. The real question is, when are you as the Premier of Ontario going to stand up for the people of Ontario, for the rule of law in Ontario, for the fact that there is one set of laws that applies to everybody in this province, and for the fact that these people here deserve better than what your government has done?

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in the letter sent to these people yesterday in Caledonia, says that the compensation is to cover "only distress and the anxiety and pain and suffering that these families have gone through." That's a quote from the minister yesterday.

I would submit to you, and I know that the residents of Caledonia would agree, that \$2,000 doesn't come close to be adequate for pain and suffering. I don't know how you would know, because you haven't been there. When I spent a night there a few weeks ago, I listened to the parents telling me about taking their children to school past the barricades and the barbed wire. I had them telling me personally about not being able to use their backyards in the summer. I had a man tell me on the phone this morning about having to move his young son out of their family home because of fears for his safety because of your inaction.

What concerns me is that there's nothing here at all for lost property values. Why won't you—

The Speaker: Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition, as part of a comfortable rant of his, accuses us on a regular basis of spending too much money. And yet yesterday he asked us to spend more money on health care, he asked us to spend more money on education, he asked us to spend more money on children affected by autism, and they're now asking us to spend more money on Caledonia. He's going to do all of this, and yet he's going to take \$2.5 billion out of health care and he's going to fund private schools in Ontario.

I think what Ontarians want is a reasonable, realistic and responsible approach to dealing with these kinds of issues. In particular, I am comfortable with the understanding that Ontarians expect that at some point in time, Prime Minister Harper and the federal government are going to come to the table, assume their appropriate responsibility and address this issue in a responsible way. And that—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tory: Let's just have a look at how the Dalton McGuinty style of spending and compensation applies: \$5.22 a day for people who have been hurt in Caledonia who have suffered unbelievable emotional turmoil in their lives and those of their children; \$5 million for a

guy who quit his job, supposedly, at Hydro. That sums up your approach right there.

We've got Mr. Dancey, a 91-year-old World War II veteran, who's been trying to sell his house for the last several months with no luck. He wants to move to North Bay to be close to his family. He believes he's going to be lucky to get \$150,000 for a quarter-of-a-million-dollar home. So he's going to lose \$100,000 on that.

I'll ask you again, do you have any plans? Would you give any thought beyond your \$5.22 a day to compensating these people for the loss in value of their homes that has happened on your watch and by your inaction?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I would remind the member opposite, the honourable leader of the official opposition, of the matter of Ipperwash. That happened some 12 years ago. That land remains occupied. There are no negotiations of any kind ongoing with respect to the reclamation of that land. That is the approach brought by that government to deal with these kinds of issues.

What have we done? We've acquired title to this land. We've set up a negotiating table. We've invited the federal government to be there on an ongoing basis. We've provided support where that was necessary. We've offered just recently more support for homeowners who are directly affected.

Again, I say on behalf of the people of Caledonia, when is the Conservative Party of Ontario going to stand up for that community and make their responsible claim to the government of Canada and ask for support to bring an end to this matter?

Mr. Tory: This business of standing up for the people of Caledonia: The people of Caledonia are going to find that very amusing coming from this Premier who has done nothing whatsoever to stand up for them—nothing. Of course today, on top of that, he offers \$5.22 a day to these people, \$5 million for the hydro CEO, \$330,000 for his negotiator and millions for his lawyers to fight the parents of autistic children. We have an e-mail from an individual who had his house appraised at \$394,000 days before this occupation began. Now he's being forced to accept a price tens of thousands of dollars less than that because of this occupation that you've allowed to go on.

This compensation package from your government does nothing for this person and your whole compensation package does nothing for the toll this has taken on people, on their lives and on their families. Why won't you compensate these people for lost property values, and why won't you step up and do something proper and adequate for these people who have suffered so much in Caledonia? Why won't you stand up for them for a change and stand up at the same time for the rule of law?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, Mr. Tory would, given the opportunity, specifically direct the police to pursue some kind of police action when it comes to the individuals who are occupying the land in question. If he would not do that, then he should just stand up and say that.

This is about a long-standing issue. It predates Confederation. It's the matter of a dispute over certain lands

between the Six Nations community and the government of Canada. This has gone on for quite some time now. It is a dispute in which the province of Ontario is caught up. Our responsibility, as I see it, is to uphold the peace and to maintain security in that community. Mr. Tory sees this quite differently. He would intervene specifically and provide specific directions to the police. We would not do that, and we will not do that. If the leader of the official opposition has a real concern and a real interest, then he will, for the first time, pick up the phone and talk to the Prime Minister of Canada and intervene on behalf of the people of Caledonia.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock, please.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the People's Republic of China. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): A question for the Premier: Yesterday's federal budget failed to close the prosperity gap for working families. In our view, yesterday's federal budget was written more for those in the boardroom rather than those in the family room. My question is this: Do you share the NDP's view that no worker in this province is worth less than \$10 an hour and that Ontario needs a \$10-an-hour minimum wage today?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): My honourable friend raises the issue of yesterday's federal budget. I want to take this opportunity to thank the people of Ontario, to thank them for their ongoing support in our pursuit of fairness on their behalf. I want to thank them for standing resolute, and I want to congratulate them for the progress we have made.

We have made three important steps forward with yesterday's federal budget. First of all, for the first time in a long time, we are actually going to receive, as Ontarians, the same amount of money for our education and social services as Canadians do in the other provinces and territories. Secondly, the agreement that I negotiated with Prime Minister Martin, the Canada-Ontario agreement, will now be well and truly honoured by Prime Minister Harper. Finally, the equalization formula has now been amended to provide that no receiving province can have a fiscal capacity greater than ours. That is only fair.

Again, I congratulate the people of Ontario for their success in our campaign for fairness.

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Mr. Hampton: Unfortunately, all of that will do nothing for the 1.2 million Ontario workers who work for less than \$10 an hour and who struggle every day to

make ends meet for their family, because those people need a \$10-an-hour minimum wage now.

Premier, someone earning your minimum wage of \$8 an hour would have to work 40 hours a week for two and a half years to receive the \$40,000 pay raise you gave yourself just before Christmas. Why are you telling 1.2 million hard-working families in Ontario who work for the minimum wage that you can't afford to give them a raise, that they don't deserve a raise, when you gave yourself a \$40,000 pay raise all in one fell swoop?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: This approach would be unfamiliar to my friend opposite, but we believe that we should be careful, responsible custodians of the Ontario economy. We brought forward a thoughtful, responsible plan for providing additional investments in areas that are vital to the people of Ontario—their education, their health care, their infrastructure—and supports for a cleaner and safer environment and a stronger economy overall. Part of our successful plan for the economy included gradual but steady increases to the minimum wage. We've raised it four times; we've raised it by 17%. The result of our approach to the economy has been 327,000 net new jobs. Under the NDP, they lost about 1,000 jobs every week. That's their approach, and that's their result.

I say again that we will be moving ahead with increases to the minimum wage. I understand their desire to learn more about that. I ask them to wait just a few more days. But again, we'll reflect a balanced, responsible, thoughtful approach.

Mr. Hampton: The Premier wants the people of Ontario to believe that he was being careful, thoughtful and responsible when he suddenly gave himself a \$40,000 pay increase at Christmastime. Meanwhile, the Premier says to those minimum wage families who are living in poverty that they're not worth \$10 an hour. Premier, you are dragging your feet while kids go hungry. Children in low-income families deserve a chance to succeed, but they can't succeed as long as the McGuinty government says that they're not worth \$10 an hour in terms of the minimum wage.

Premier, it's time for fairness. It's time for some leadership on this issue. It's time to put an end to what is a provincial disgrace. Will you raise the minimum wage in Ontario to \$10 an hour today?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The short answer to that is no. Just as it would be irresponsible to hold the minimum wage at \$8 an hour indefinitely, it would also be just as irresponsible to raise it to \$10 an hour overnight. The leader of the NDP and I just happen to see things differently in this regard.

But I would compare our record when it comes to management of the economy against their record. They lost about 1,000 jobs every week on their watch. As a result of putting our plan in place, we have acquired 327,000 net new jobs. Again, we will be moving towards a higher minimum wage, but we will be doing it the way we've already done it: in a thoughtful, balanced and responsible way.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Premier: This is interesting. The Premier's logic is that it's okay to raise his own pay by \$40,000 a year overnight, but it's not okay to raise the wages of the lowest-paid workers to \$10 an hour so they can have a living wage.

Premier, you had a lot to say about the federal budget. The federal budget says that next year the Canada social transfer will give \$340 million more to your government for post-secondary education. Now, your government, unfortunately, has a history of taking federal money that was intended for child care, intended for child poverty or intended for housing and using it and spending it somewhere else entirely.

My question is this, Premier: Will you do the right thing and take that \$340 million of new federal money for post-secondary education and use it to freeze tuition fees and increase access for hard-working Ontario families so they can go to university or college?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The short answer is no, we will not do that. We're proud of the progress we've made on the post-secondary education front, proud of the fact that we have some 86,000 more young people enrolled in our colleges and universities today than we had some two and a half years ago and proud of the fact, in particular, that we have brought back grants that had been eliminated by the NDP when they were in government. They just didn't consider the needs of our most needy young people when it came to meeting their tuition costs, so we brought back those grants, and 120,000 young people today in Ontario are the beneficiaries of our grant program.

I'm always open to reasonable and thoughtful advice when it comes to making further improvements to post-secondary education, because we understand it is so vital to ensuring our bright future as an economy and as a society. But, no, we will not be freezing tuition.

Mr. Hampton: I thought the question was reasonably straightforward and clear: Are you going to take this money and use it to freeze tuition fees?

Premier, working families are more concerned than ever about the cost of securing a good education for their kids. Under the McGuinty government, Ontario students are now paying some of the highest university tuition fees in the country. Four out of five Ontarians now say they're worried that young people won't be able to attend university or college because of the high tuition fees.

The McGuinty government has received \$340 million of new federal money to be used for post-secondary education. My question again: Will you use that \$340 million to freeze tuition fees so students can afford to go to college and university, or are you going to continue to drive tuition fees through the roof?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I'd recommend to my honourable friend that he take a look at the facts, because students are voting with their feet. He would portray our

\$6.2-billion investment in post-secondary education, an investment that is without precedent in the history of this province, as impeding access to college and university, but 86,000 more young people are now enrolled in Ontario colleges and universities. We're supporting that in part through our generous doubling of student assistance, including bringing into being in the province of Ontario student grants.

Again I say, students are voting with their feet. That's why they're going on to college and university in unprecedented numbers in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question?

Mr. Hampton: The fact is that students in Ontario are racking up higher and higher debts all the time.

Premier, during the 2003 election you promised you were going to end the clawback of the national child benefit, you promised you were going to increase education spending and you promised you were going to freeze tuition. Well, you failed to end the clawback of the national child benefit, you failed to fix the education funding formula for our schools and your tuition freeze lasted for only two years, and now you're driving tuition fees higher than ever.

We hear your promises, but if you're not prepared to at least freeze tuition fees so people can afford to go to university and college, how do you expect anyone across Ontario to believe anything you say about post-secondary funding?

1500

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: There's a really good story to be told in Ontario when it comes to education, particularly post-secondary education. The leader of the NDP just doesn't want to hear it and he certainly will never tell it: a \$6.2-billion new investment in our plan. We froze tuition for two years. That was the first tuition freeze in Ontario history. Eighty-six thousand more young people are now enrolled in our colleges and universities. One hundred and twenty thousand young people are now the beneficiaries of student grants, which were eliminated by the NDP government. We're now building 14,000 more graduate school spaces in our universities in the province of Ontario.

We understand much more so than the NDP, for whom this is a favourite political football, that our future hangs in the balance when it comes to ensuring that every capable young person who's got the desire and the marks has a space available in our colleges and universities so they can achieve their potential and help Ontario thereby achieve its potential. That's what we're doing in Ontario: We're standing behind our students and making sure they've got the spaces available.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. I want to follow up on an issue I raised with the Premier yesterday which the Premier didn't deal with at that time. He and his minister

have made a big point of principle that the Don Mills Surgical Unit will not under any circumstances be allowed to perform 1,500 knee surgeries paid for by OHIP, with the OHIP card of the people involved, in order to reduce wait times for people in the province who are waiting in many cases in pain and in many other cases for upwards of two years for this surgery which the Dalton McGuinty government claims is a priority.

This very same Dalton McGuinty government is providing public funding to the very same hospital to perform cataract removals under the very same wait times program. So my question is this: Why is it okay for this hospital, with public funds, to perform cataract surgery for people on the wait-list, but it's not okay for them to perform knee replacement surgery for people who are waiting months and months in pain to have that surgery? Why is one okay and not the other?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): When the House was sitting in the fall, the Conservative leader had but one policy with respect to health care: It was a \$2.5-billion cut. Then, a couple of months later, he's come up with his next policy, and that is to privatize health care. We know one more conversation with Mike Harris and they'll have his whole health care platform put to bed.

With respect, we believe in results. The front-line health care workers in the province of Ontario have been working hard to produce results by reducing wait times for knee surgery by more than 30%. We believe fundamentally that the reforms and the innovation that are possible must occur in the context of the public health care system. This is where the action is, and we want to make sure that the public health care system continues to be under influence of innovation to provide even better results for the people of the province of Ontario. We believe in this case that the not-for-profit model moving forward in the context of our public health care system is the way to produce continuing results for the people of the province of Ontario.

Mr. Tory: I think the people will have a lot of trouble understanding your contradiction on this, where you think it's going to damage the public health system to have knee replacements done at this hospital, which would save time and suffering—and they might even find an innovative way to do it—but you think it's okay to have people have their cataract operation there. What the Ottawa Citizen says today is that Dalton McGuinty and George Smitherman are saying to people waiting in pain that they should “take a shot of whiskey and bite down on a steel bar while they wait” 641 days for knee surgery in Ottawa. You refuse to look at an option that could innovatively and quickly and efficiently, at public expense, paid for with the OHIP card, do exactly the same as you're doing with the cataracts. Why will you not even consider this option that would see this care provided on a timely basis, publicly paid for with the OHIP card? Why won't you even explore this proposal by the Don Mills Surgical Unit?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Wait times for knee surgery in the province of Ontario are down by 30% as a result of this Premier's dedication to the issue. The system in our province that we inherited, if you can call it that, from the Harris people that preceded us, who are now the advisers to this Conservative leader, could not even measure what the wait time was. In short time we've not only created the capacity to measure it, but we have demonstrated results in reducing it. Accordingly, the capacity to further reduce wait times for knee surgery in Ontario is there in the context of the public health care system, because the leaders in the public health care system, the nurses and the doctors on the front line, have worked hard to produce it.

We are a government that stands in favour of results for health care. We are a government that has produced lower wait times for procedures in health care, and we are a government that will continue to move forward in the context of our public health care system to produce even more impressive results for—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Premier. Last week, members of our caucus brought forward the case of Cheryl Patterson. You will remember that case. Your government was clawing back her disabled children's orphan benefits after their father passed away last June. Your government was clawing back the money from one child with a diagnosed mental illness and from another child with a brain tumour, and you left them with \$17 per month from Ontario Works. You are forcing more tragedy on these young lives.

My question is a simple one: Will you reinstate the benefits that you clawed back from them retroactive to January when you began this heinous practice?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): As the member opposite knows, I cannot talk about this specific case. He must know that by now.

We realize how hard some people are struggling on low-income work to improve their circumstances, and we're doing our best to support them. Social assistance is a program of last resort paid for by the taxpayers of Ontario. Recipients are assessed based on their financial need, which is updated as circumstances change. We are committed to treating people with fairness and dignity and making sure that support is directed to those who need it most.

I must add also that this is the practice across the country. So this CPP is added to the income. As I said, this is a program of last resort, and it's the same practice all across the country.

Mr. Prue: I cannot believe the answer from the honourable minister here. I cannot believe that you're giving this answer about two orphaned children, one with a brain tumour and the other who suffers from a mental illness. You are saying that because other governments claw back the money, it's okay for you to do the same thing. This is a heinous practice. This is something you should be ashamed of, not standing on your feet to say that it's just like everybody else. You should be showing leadership. You should be stopping the program. You should stop being a "Harris lite," because that's all this government is when it comes to poor and disabled children who have been orphaned.

You should be reinstating the money to Cheryl Patterson and you should be ending this disgraceful claw-back. Will you reconsider your words? Will you do what is right, not what is written on that piece of paper?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Again, I just want to reiterate that this program is a program of last resort. All the provinces across Canada treat this type of benefit as income for the purpose of social assistance.

And let me add something: This practice has been in place since the beginning. This party sat as the government for five years. What did they do? Nothing. The practice continues, and now, because they're not in power, they're saying to us, "Change it." They were there for five years and did nothing about it.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. As you're aware, last week an automotive parts manufacturer in the United States filed their application for bankruptcy protection, affecting the GenFast facility in my riding. They also announced at the time that the company's plans are to close the plant in Brantford by the end of May. As a result of this closure, 235 people will be out of work and are understandably concerned about their futures and the impact on their families.

GenFast is a fixture in the community. It has been in Brantford since the first part of the 20th century, and known by many other names. Many people who will be out of work have spent their entire careers at GenFast. Some of these hard-working individuals may require assistance in navigating the job market and searching for new jobs, or they may need retraining and upgrading their skills to re-enter the workforce.

Minister, what advice, options and assistance can you offer to my constituents during this very difficult and stressful time?

1510

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): We're very sorry to hear about the proposed closing, the intended closing of the plant, and very sorry for the workers and their families. Our obligation as a government is to get in as quickly as possible and provide the support that's necessary. That's why we've instituted, under Employment Ontario, our

employment and training network, a rapid re-employment strategy.

We start with immediately contacting all of those involved—municipal officials, the union, the company—and advise them that we're going to have an action team on the ground immediately. Within 30 days, there's an action plan for the community which will tie the community into the services that are available in the community; for example, through Job Connect. Whether it's counselling, support, job retraining, apprenticeship location or additional training that's required, we identify what we have and connect the workers up. Secondly, we identify any gaps and bring in new and additional support. Third, we'll develop individual action plans for the workers affected within 15 days so they get the specialized support that they need. The goal is to connect every worker up with the next job opportunity.

Mr. Levac: Thank you, Minister. I have to say to you that I appreciate the work that you and your office have done for my riding. Unfortunately, it's happened a couple of other times, and I will indeed confess to the fact that your rapid deployment works very well and that it has worked in my community, and I appreciate that very much. I appreciate the work that you're doing, along with my municipal partners, who have worked with the ministry in the past, who have already passed a resolution to act and asked us to work together so that we can save and help those people who are affected by these layoffs.

For example, I know that Employment Ontario's Job Connect has helped many of the people in the riding—helped them update their resumés, their job searches, and match skills to job opportunities that are starting to be created in my riding. They also are a reliable source that I can call on when a constituent is faced with job hunting.

GenFast employees must start to feel some reassurance to hear that we're moving quickly, effectively and efficiently. I'm sure that many of the employees will find various types of assistance available through our government and the municipality. But Minister, how does this program fit in with our government's economic plans and start to apply the skills that these workers have to get them into jobs that are now present in my riding?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I refer that to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues): I'm very pleased to stand and suggest that there are so many good things happening in the Brantford area. The local MPP is providing tremendous leadership in bringing companies to us when it's appropriate that we can partner with them. A great example, frankly, is a great Italian company, Ferrero, which recently opened a plant in the area, bringing 1,200 jobs by 2009. The next announcement that I was at myself was for Koolatron—another firm that worked with our advanced manufacturing investment strategy, maintaining those jobs—which uses NASA-equipped innovation and bringing it right home to Brantford, Ontario.

We have tremendous opportunities with our ministry. In fact, Koolatron, this company that we just had the

pleasure of visiting, is now entering the Home Depot supply chain, thanks to a supply fair where our ministry brought Home Depot Canada to Ontario suppliers. Koolatron is a beneficiary of that.

There are many good things happening in Brantford, and we are very happy to be a part of that.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Premier. Notwithstanding, as we've been discussing, that there are people waiting literally years in pain and suffering to have their knee replacements done and that you refuse to give them any consideration or to consider any innovative option at all for those people, I would ask you this question: Given that any involvement at all by this Don Mills Surgical Unit seems to be, as your minister says and as you've said, a threat to the public health care system—the ministry even suggested that it is a threat to Canadian values—when can we expect your office to be issuing a letter instructing the Minister of Health to stop funding the cataract and arthroscopic knee procedures being done there now, which are funded by OHIP? If this is a threat to Canadian health care as we know it, I want to know when you're going to issue the letter saying that they should no longer be performing cataract operations and arthroscopic knee surgery, if you're being consistent with how you're treating these people who are suffering while waiting for a knee replacement. When will the instruction—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question's been asked. Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Health never said that, nor did he imply that the services being provided at present represent a threat. The issue, from our perspective, is, where do we move on a go-forward basis?

I think it represents intellectual laziness to say that we cannot bring about innovation within the public health care system. We think that working with our doctors, our nurses, our technicians and everybody who is committed and devoted to public health care in Ontario, we can bring about real, meaningful and measurable progress when it comes to wait times. And the facts bear that out. We keep reducing wait times.

The leader of the official opposition comes from a party that wouldn't even measure wait times. Not only have we measured them and made those public, thirdly, we've put in place a plan which is actually getting wait times down for the first time in Ontario. What I would ask the leader of the official opposition to do is to stand up and support all those people who dedicate themselves to reducing wait times inside the public health care system.

Mr. Tory: I'm delighted to get up and say I support and commend all of those people. That's not the question. They are trying to do their best, but the fact of the matter is that people are still waiting 600 days, 500 days, 700 days, 641 days in your own home community of

Ottawa, in pain and suffering to get a knee replacement. And you refuse, speaking of innovation—you see, that's part of the problem. You think every bit of innovation has to come from a government employee. We actually disagree. We think there are great innovators out there who may not be on the public payroll directly but who could provide publicly paid-for health procedures with the OHIP card. Why is it okay to have the cataracts done by this clinic, paid for by your government and by the taxpayers, and not okay to have the knee replacements done? And if it's not okay generally, when are you going to stop the cataracts and the arthroscopic knee surgeries from being done? When are you going to stop this threat to public health care as we know it? When are you going to stop this assault on Canadian values which is such complete—

The Speaker: Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition may be interested to learn that in Don Mills, that private, for-profit operation is doing about 0.2% of our cataracts throughout the province of Ontario.

I think it was Toe Blake who said, "You never break up a winning combination." Working with public health care in Ontario, we have brought angiographies down by 50%—that's down 28 days—angioplasties are down 11 days, cataract surgeries down 128 days, hip replacements down 94 days, knee replacements down 133 days, MRIs down 15 days, CT scans down 19 days, cancer surgeries down 13 days and bypass surgeries down one day.

Are we making progress? Absolutely. Is there more work to be done? Of course there is, but we have found that the way to get this work done is by working with our nurses, our doctors, our technicians, our Ontarians who are devoted to improving the quality of their public health care system.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): A question to the Minister of Education: Minister, yesterday you made another frozen molasses funding announcement for public education, but 20 school boards could not get frozen molasses to sweeten the bitter news you gave them. They're all receiving less real dollars today than they did two years ago. Some of these boards are Algoma, CSD catholique des Grandes Rivières, DSB Ontario North East, Huron-Superior Catholic DSB, Keewatin-Patricia DSB, Lakehead DSB, Near North DSB, Northeastern Catholic DSB, Northwest Catholic DSB, Rainy River DSB, Superior North Catholic DSB, Superior-Greenstone DSB and others. Other than you starving them for funds, can you tell me what other thing these school boards have in common?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I think the remarkable thing about the investments we're making in education is that we're making those investments in spite of the fact that across this province enrolment is declining. Money is going up. There are more teachers in the schools, there are more resources in the schools, more students are graduating from school and at

the same time there are fewer students in our schools. So we are protecting boards. There is no board in this province that is getting less money this year than they got last year, and 63 of the 72 boards are going to have fewer students than they had last year.

We acknowledge that we need to increase funding and to keep those school boards in good shape for the students who are there. That's the good news for Ontario. The 781 million new dollars that are going into education are going to improve the education of students in this province regardless of whether they're in a board where the enrolment is going down.

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Mr. Marchese: Minister, you say "declining enrolment" as if you can cash it at the bank. But let me tell you the answer to the question. I will tell you what they all have in common: They are all northern school boards. Northern schools are receiving 11 million real dollars less today than two years ago, less money despite having to pay for the same buses, heat and repair of the same schools. Will you stop ignoring working families in the north and give northern children the education they deserve?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: When I was first appointed to this job, I went to the north and I talked to the directors in the north. What they said to me is, "We need you to acknowledge transportation needs. We need you to look at funding for aboriginal students. We need you to recognize that we're in declining enrolment but we need support for our schools."

What have we done? We have done exactly what Mr. Rozanski said we should do. We've put in a line for aboriginal students. We are, for the first time in this province, supporting in a structural way funding for aboriginal students, and I can tell you that the boards the member opposite is talking about are very pleased about that. At the same time, we have increased the benchmarks in each area for those boards the same as we have across the province, even though, on average, the decline in the northern boards is around 10% in terms of enrolment. So the funding is up even though the enrolment is down.

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The Ontario's driver's licence one of the most commonly used pieces of identification among Ontarians. We have all heard recently that the government is now working toward creating a new, more secure driver's licence. Drivers' licences contain a considerable amount of personal information, and because of the frequency with which we use them, that information will be exposed to a number of individuals.

Minister, can you tell members of this House how this new driver's licence will protect the security and privacy of Ontario's drivers?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I thank the member for the question. First and

foremost, the security and the integrity of the card is absolutely paramount to the driver's licence, and that is also paramount to us as a government. What we've done is put in place a new contract—I had the privilege of announcing that contract a couple of weeks ago—for a new card production starting in December 2007, and this is where the integrity of the card cannot be compromised. In fact, what we've done is, we've actually made it more difficult for that card to be tampered with. We've increased the protection of the personal data on the card.

As I indicated, that protection is absolutely paramount. Security features that I can talk to you about include a two debar code, a secondary photo, signature images, ultraviolet features which are really invisible to the naked eye, a fine line background and new colour. That only speaks to those security measures that you can see; there are others you cannot.

Mr. Brownell: The people of my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh will be pleased to see that a modified licence will protect their identity while also decreasing the possibility for counterfeit licences.

Recently our Premier and his counterparts from other provinces were in Washington to discuss using a driver's licence as an alternative to the passport for cross-border travel with the United States. In border communities like Cornwall and others in my right riding, the significance of cross-border trade, day trips and vacations cannot be understated. Indeed, the livelihood of many Ontarians depends on their ability to cross easily between our two great countries.

Minister, how will this new driver's licence help balance this need with the greater security concerns both our countries are facing?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Primarily, the most important thing that we can do is continue to advocate for an option other than just the passport, to really continue to advocate for an alternative ID. We believe that the security measures that are currently embedded in this new production of the card are sufficient to satisfy the homeland security people. All we'd need to add is the Canadian citizenship portion of it.

We know that if we continue to advocate and have those discussions such as the Premier is continuing to have, we have a viable alternative to allow people to move back and forth across the border as they need to on a daily basis. So we will continue to do that. We have the measures with which to do it. We can protect. When we get to the point of the discussions, we will obviously include the privacy commissioner to ensure that all the information that we put on there is the information that is required, nothing more and nothing less. We know that we have a card, in fact, that can do the service of being an alternative to the passport, and we will continue to be a strong advocate in that direction.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): My question is to the Minister of Education. A young girl of 16 in the Waterloo school system was a victim of bullying in the

school. A year later, that same child was a witness to the assault of another child by the same bullies. The vice-principal of the school told the child to write out what she had observed, but not to sign the memorandum, to preserve her secrecy. The child's name was then inserted by the school administration in the memorandum, and the memorandum delivered to the police. A child is now a public police witness in criminal charges laid against the bullies.

My question is, does a person in authority, having care and control of a child in a school, have the right to obtain a written statement for the purpose of a criminal investigation without the permission of her parents and without providing the child with a clear understanding of the consequences?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): Thank you for the question. I'm not going to comment on a specific case where I do not know the specifics. It would not be appropriate for me to pass judgment on a case when I have no idea exactly what the circumstances were. But I would say to the member opposite that if he has concerns, if he has a specific question, he could get in touch with my office—this is the first I've heard of this case—and I'd be happy to follow up with him.

Mr. Martiniuk: As a result of the fear of retaliation, this child quit school, and though the parents have objected to the school board, no action was taken. My letter to you, Madam Minister, of February 28, 2007, has the facts as I've related them, and your staff has already told me that you're not going to do anything about it.

Minister, who will protect the children in our schools if even a minister of the crown refuses protection? You, by your inaction, have put children in schools across this province in harm's way. They look to you for protection, and as minister responsible, you have let them down. Will you not stop this invasion of our children's privacy in our schools?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I want to thank the member opposite for bringing this issue to my attention. As I said, I would be happy to follow up with him. If he gets in touch with my office, I'd be happy to do everything I can to get information back to him.

PAPER MILL

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Both myself and Charlie Angus, the federal member of Parliament for Timmins–James Bay, were in Iroquois Falls last week at the Ontario Municipal Board hearings that are dealing with the request by Abitibi to sever the power dams on the paper mill in Iroquois Falls. We learned at that hearing that your ministry approved the transfer on the water rights in August 2006. Now, imagine the surprise of Mr. Roger Hardy, who was at that hearing and is the president of the local union that represents the workers, who got a letter from you dated March 5 that says, "It is not yet clear if the restructuring will result in a transfer

requirement at all. Accordingly, there has been no request made for my consent."

Who are we to believe—the Ontario Municipal Board evidence or the Minister of Natural Resources' letter—as to whether those water rights were actually transferred?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I stand by the letter that I sent to Roger Hardy about 10 days ago.

Mr. Bisson: Well, I'll tell you, people in Iroquois Falls are hopping mad, and it would probably be a good idea if you went there and visited them. They sat there at that hearing and were flabbergasted to hear—they had been told by you on numerous occasions that those water rights have not been transferred, and they heard at the OMB hearings that in fact they have. People are beside themselves. I say again, are you standing by this letter and are you saying here in the Legislature today that in fact the water rights have not been transferred on those power dams?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I stand by the letter that I sent to Roger Hardy, the president of the local union there at the Abitibi mill. I met with the union executive about two months ago in Iroquois Falls and have been up to the community since then to also talk to council about the issue. I stand by that letter. We had a meeting within our legal branch the other day to get that clear, and that's the legal interpretation from MNR.

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PRODUITS AGRICOLES ONTARIENS ONTARIO PRODUCE

M^{me} Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): Ma question est pour le ministre de la Promotion de la santé. Monsieur le ministre, il a toujours été difficile pour nos communautés du nord d'avoir accès aux fruits et légumes nutritifs du sud de l'Ontario. Pouvez-vous me dire ce que votre ministère met en place afin de mieux approvisionner nos communautés du nord avec les fruits et légumes du sud de l'Ontario?

L'hon. Jim Watson (ministre de la Promotion de la santé): Je remercie la députée de Nipissing pour sa question. J'ai eu le plaisir de lancer un programme pilote pour les fruits et les légumes dans le nord de l'Ontario qui coûte 500 000 \$. J'ai visité la communauté d'Iroquois Falls avec mon collègue, M. le ministre Ramsay, et c'est un projet pilote avec la coopération du ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Association des fruiticulteurs, du Bureau de santé de Porcupine, et des écoles et conseils scolaires locaux.

This pilot program provides about 25 schools in the Porcupine district with fresh fruit and vegetable snacks three times a week. As the chair of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, Brenda Lammens, said, it's a win-win situation. We're providing an opportunity for local farmers to provide the fruit and vegetables, and the kids up north are getting a fresh fruit and vegetable snack three times a week. Je suis très fier de ce programme.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Supplementary?

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): I have a question as well with regard to Ontario's fruits and vegetables, but I would like the Minister of Agriculture to answer it. My question is, at this year's summit, the Premier hinted that our government will be unveiling a new branding and marketing strategy for Ontario produce. Minister, could you please explain to my constituents, particularly those who produce vegetables and fruit, how this new branding and marketing strategy will benefit farmers in the Essex riding?

Hon. Mr. Watson: I refer the question to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I'm very, very happy to have the opportunity to talk about a marketing and branding initiative that the Premier talked about at the Premier's summit about a week ago. Actually, I'm delighted to say that a year ago I had asked agriculture stakeholders to bring advice to the government around how we can better support the agriculture industry. They brought back to me recommendations. A very significant part of that document, the Minister's Strategic Advisory Committee report, did identify that it would be important for Ontario to embark on a marketing and branding strategy. That very day, our Premier acted and indicated that indeed our government is going to be moving on a marketing and branding strategy. This strategy will educate the people of Ontario that we have the safest and best-quality food; and, number two, this is going to help the agriculture industry as we promote products that are produced right here in Ontario.

GREENBELT FOUNDATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I have a question for the minister responsible for the greenbelt. Minister, I know you're a strong supporter of the Niagara Escarpment Commission, which is headquartered in Georgetown. I know the minister is a strong supporter and holds the Niagara Parks Commission in high regard, which is just next door to him in Niagara Falls, to his St. Catharines. I know further that the minister is a supporter of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, started by the previous Mike Harris PC government, which is headquartered in King City in the Oak Ridges moraine. So if the escarpment commission is near the escarpment, the Niagara Parks Commission is in Niagara Falls and the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation is in King City, do you think it's appropriate that the Greenbelt Foundation is in the most swanky retail area in the city of Toronto, in Yorkville, instead of being in the greenbelt area?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I know that the member says that, and when he was asked about it, I know he just didn't have time to give all the information. That often happens—I understand that very much: You're asked a question, you're

putting out a release, and you don't have the full information to give out to people. It's not that you're trying to hold anything back at all. But I have to tell the member that the Greenbelt Foundation operates an office in Nobleton, Ontario.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): Is that in the greenbelt?

Hon. Mr. Bradley: As I understand it, that is in the greenbelt. I know he didn't have time to tell everybody that. But now that everybody knows, it's great to see that there's an office in Nobleton, Ontario.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I agree with him: Nobleton is a great place to have an office.

PETITIONS

CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'd like to present a petition on behalf of my constituents. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the lung association's Women and COPD national report 2006 reveals that more than 425,000 Canadian women have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and more than 4,300 will die of the disease this year; and

"Whereas the Women and COPD national report indicates that since 2000, female mortality due to COPD has risen at double the rate of breast cancer"—double the rate; it's unbelievable;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support a call to action for early diagnosis and optimized management of COPD to reduce illness and suffering;

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support the Ontario Lung Association's COPD advisory panel report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care on the prevention and management of COPD in Ontario; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario endorse a comprehensive strategy to address COPD in this province."

I am pleased to sign this on behalf of the many families and women in the province of Ontario.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South-Weston): I'm pleased to present this petition signed by more than 500 residents of the greater Toronto area, including a couple of dozen from my riding of York South-Weston. It's addressed:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 122,000 households across Ontario are on waiting lists for affordable housing, enduring wait times of five to 10 years;

"Whereas housing affordability problems are worsening in Ontario, with one tenant household in five paying at least 50% of its income on rent and almost 65,000 facing eviction in 2005 because they couldn't afford to pay their rent;

"Whereas Ontario's current social housing stock is increasingly rundown, with tenants forced to endure degrading conditions, including mould, cockroaches and mice; and

"Whereas the cost of ignoring the plight of our poorly housed and homeless neighbours affects all citizens of Ontario through increased health costs, emergency shelter costs and other public expenditures;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure there is a major allocation of funding for affordable and supportive housing in Ontario's 2007 provincial budget, with a commitment to release this funding quickly; and

"To urge the government of Ontario to reassume financial responsibility for the cost and repair of the current social housing stock which was downloaded onto municipalities who cannot afford repair and upkeep costs."

I proudly affix my name to the petition.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): This is a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly regarding the regulating of zoos to protect animals and communities.

"Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

"Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

"Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

"Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

"Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP David Zimmer's bill, the Regulation of Zoos Act."

I sign this petition and hand it to page Jordan.

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LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provision in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to: increase long-term-care operating funds by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

It's signed by hundreds of constituents from Waterloo-Wellington.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been signed by the residents and families of the Elizabeth Centre in my riding. I want to thank them for delivering this to my office. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provision in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to: increase long-term-care operating funds by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and

address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

I agree with the petitioners. I've affixed my signature to this.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): This is a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

“Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

“Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

“Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

“Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP David Zimmer's bill, the Regulation of Zoos Act.”

This is signed by a couple of hundred high school students.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario presented to me by Mike Crna. He's a person involved with Community Living Tillsonburg. It's signed by many people from Community Living Tillsonburg and Community Living around the province.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario disability support program is designed to meet the unique needs of people with disabilities who are in financial need, or who want and are able to work and need support; and

“Whereas the ODSP benefit levels had been frozen for almost 10 years under previous governments; and

“Whereas it is appreciated that the McGuinty government increased the maximum monthly rate for ODSP by 3% in 2004 and a further 2% in 2006;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to increase the Ontario disability support program payments on an annual basis to ensure it covers the cost-of-living increase incurred by ODSP recipients.”

I affix my signature to this petition, as I agree with it.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have a petition from some members of the

Cornwall Township Historical Society, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

“Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

“Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with a historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

“Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Enact Bill 25, An Act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario.”

As I agree with this petition, I'll affix my signature and send it with Cody to the Clerk's table.

NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) plays a vital role in the conservation and management of the natural resources that belong to all Ontarians; and

“Whereas the MNR budget for 2006-07 is 24% less, in real terms, than it was in 1992-93; and

“Whereas vital programs relating to fish and wildlife, provincial parks, enforcement, forestry, and other MNR activities continue to be cut back; and

“Whereas the ... economic, educational, environmental, recreational and social value of our natural resources far exceeds the cost of protecting and managing them;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That funding of the Ministry of Natural Resources be increased to a level that will enable it to stop cutting existing programs and provide full funding to all existing programs as well as any new programs that may be required to ensure the effective protection and management of Ontario's natural resources.”

As I believe in it, I will affix my name.

ROAD SAFETY

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have quite a significant number of petitions, and they were provided to me from all over the province. They were gathered and inspired by a woman named Adrienne Seggie, who you might know had the terrible tragedy of the loss of her son in a downtown street in Hamilton. So the people who are

worried about street racing sent these petitions into the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Matthew Power, 21, a pedestrian crossing a Hamilton roadway on a green light, was struck and killed by a street racing motorist on November 4, 2006;

"Whereas street racing shows reckless disregard for the risk it poses to human life, the safety of Ontario roads and highways and the people who travel them; and

"Whereas Matthew Power and his grieving family are among a growing number of Ontarians victimized by street racing;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the government must change legislation to provide for mandatory prison sentences for convictions of homicide caused by street racing."

I'm signing this petition and sending it down to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): I think I got the shortened version of the long-term-care petition from the good folk at Alexander Place in Flamborough.

It reads, "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I did promise that I would present that petition myself in the House.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm presenting 831 petitions to the Legislature delivered to me by Mr. Murray MacAdam of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 122,000 households across Ontario are on waiting lists for affordable housing, enduring wait times of five to 10 years;

"Whereas housing affordability problems are worsening in Ontario, with one tenant household in five paying at least 50% of its income on rent, and almost 65,000 facing eviction in 2005 because they couldn't afford to pay their rent;

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"Whereas Ontario's current social housing stock is increasingly run down, with tenants forced to endure

degrading conditions, including mould, cockroaches and mice; and

"Whereas the cost of ignoring the plight of our poorly housed and homeless neighbours affects all citizens of Ontario through increased health costs, emergency shelter costs and other public expenditures;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To ensure there is a major allocation of funding for affordable and supportive housing in Ontario's 2007 provincial budget, with a commitment to release this funding quickly; and

"To urge the government of Ontario to reassume financial responsibility for the cost and repair of the current social housing stock which was downloaded onto municipalities who cannot afford repair and upkeep costs."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The time for petitions, unfortunately, has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTH SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DU SYSTÈME DE SANTÉ

Mr. Smitherman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to improve health systems by amending or repealing various enactments and enacting certain Acts / Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à améliorer les systèmes de santé en modifiant ou en abrogeant divers textes de loi et en édictant certaines lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I assume the minister wishes to lead off debate. I recognize the Minister of Health to lead off the debate on Bill 171.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): At the outset, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mississauga East.

It is indeed a tremendous privilege to have the opportunity today to stand and to speak about Bill 171. It is for me a bit of a—

Interjection

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I hear the heckling has begun from the member from Durham already.

It is a substantial milestone for me. I'm getting to be, for some people at least, long in the tooth as the Minister of Health, and this is the 10th bill that I have been very privileged to bring to the order paper in this place.

I want to thank all of those—and it's very many people—who have been dedicated to working on the contents of this bill. There is no doubt whatsoever that anyone who has had an opportunity, even on a cursory basis, to review it will know it is a very substantial piece

of legislation indeed. To those at the body known as HPRAC, to the lawyers and other policy makers and officials in my ministry and most especially to Abid Malik, who deserves special credit in my office for his great efforts, I want to acknowledge that a lot of work has gone into this from very many parties.

The legislation that is before the House has got, as I mentioned, quite a few elements to it. Let me speak at a high level and then get into a bit of detail around those. This bill will help to provide the people of the province of Ontario with greater access to a variety of regulated health professions. The history of regulated health professions dates back to the early 1990s, when the government of the day regulated many. Through this bill, we would be bringing more health care providers into regulation in the province of Ontario. This is an acknowledgment of the important work that they do and an acknowledgment as well of the sheer necessity of offering the public all of the appropriate protection that regulation is designed to provide.

This is a bill that substantively helps to make sure that Ontario applies all of the appropriate lessons that have been learned by our province related to SARS. We have had the tremendous advantage of work by Justice Campbell and others in this regard, and I will have a chance to speak about how Ontario continues to evolve to be a jurisdiction that is world-leading in terms of its public health capacities.

This bill streamlines and enhances the transparency in the complaints procedures that would apply to all of the regulated health professions. It develops a new medical review audit process and review board for doctors that's based on the recommendations that came from the work done by former Supreme Court Justice Peter Cory. This bill establishes the Ontario agency for health protection and promotion, and it increases patient access, as I said, to regulated health professions.

I want to speak first off to the Cory report. One of the items of rare unanimity that occurred in this Legislature was when all parties decided to have what was known as the MRC process stand down. There was considerable concern with respect to the way that physician billings were audited by the ministry. Accordingly, we asked an esteemed gentleman Justice Peter Cory, former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, to lead a review, and the Cory report was issued. This is a bill that brings his recommendations to life.

We fulfill our commitment to get rid of the previous medical audit system. We had a transitional act. This advice from Justice Cory that is embedded in this bill builds on the very sound principle that our doctors are reliable and honest professionals. We've worked really closely with the Ontario Medical Association in order to ensure that the amendments that came forward really did build on this fundamental understanding I mentioned just a second ago, and that is about our doctors—about their reliability and their honesty, the degree to which they enjoy fine favour amongst pretty well everybody in our communities.

The proposed medical audit review, as I mentioned, substantially implements Mr. Cory's recommendations. What it seeks to do is turn us from being focused on how we might review a physician's billing practices, instead getting that resource focused on trying to ensure that they get all of the necessary training and education to be involved in that billing process. The fee model for doctors in the province of Ontario is a complex one, and it seems upon reflection that we have not historically done a good enough job of arming our doctors with all the information they need about how to work within that system. There is a new review board that has been created that is designed to restore the confidence of Ontario's doctors in the fairness of the audit system.

There is no doubt whatsoever that when an allocation of many billions of dollars is made for physicians it is crucial that appropriate safeguards be there for the public. We seek to do that in a fashion which builds on the principles of confidence, trust and honesty we know are embodied in the doctors of the province of Ontario but at the same time that those important measures of accountability will be enhanced.

I spoke at the outset about public health. I believe that of the many initiatives that are in this piece of legislation—and like I said, it's a substantive one for sure—one of those that we must reflect on the most, that affects all of us in Ontario, is that as a jurisdiction that learned very difficult lessons associated with SARS, we have been the government that came in subsequent to SARS and have been very dedicated, as appropriate, to making sure that the lessons learned were well applied.

I'm really proud that this bill helps to bring to life our own centre for disease control, sometimes referred to as the "centre of disease control for the north," and that is in the form of our very own Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Agency, set up as an independent organization at arm's length from government. What we're seeking to do is create a much greater capacity to be aware and conscious of the ills and risks that are out there in our society, and to have the capacity, in a very timely way, to address those to ensure that Ontarians are benefiting from the very best public health. I'm really proud to be part of the government that in reasonably short order has increased public health spending in the province of Ontario by 116%. This is a reflection on the dedication that we bring to enhancing the quality of public health.

I said before that we benefited from the fantastic work of Justice Campbell. He has been so diligent and so concerned about making sure that he gave us the best advice possible. He's been very accessible to health care workers, just as one example. His reports have really helped to shape the amendments to the Health Protection and Promotion Act which are an important part of this bill. But I would be wise to acknowledge others, including Dr. David Naylor, the esteemed head of the University of Toronto, and Dr. David Walker, the dean of health sciences at Queen's University, examples of two other gentlemen who have dedicated a lot of work to making sure that Ontario's public health capacities are appro-

privately enhanced, again related to the tragic lessons that we learned around to SARS.

In terms of increasing access for patients, this really has been the hallmark of our government—seeking to make sure people have access in a timely way to health professions. But we know as well that many people are accessing a wider variety of health care practitioners. Accordingly, we brought in a stand-alone bill recently that I was privileged to move forward, and that was to regulate the practice of traditional Chinese medicine. This bill brings four other health professions into regulation. If passed, we would see naturopathy, homeopathy, kinesiology and psychotherapy regulated. We think this a really crucial acknowledgment that many people in our communities are taking advantage of the health services provided by these professions, but at the same time, the degree of regulation associated with them did not offer all the protection that we think needs to be there for our patients. Accordingly, we're moving forward, at the same time enhancing the scope of practice for other already regulated health professions in our province. Nurse practitioners, optometrists, dental hygienists and pharmacists are all examples of how, under this bill, their scope of practice and ability to perform important services for patients will be enhanced, and we're really proud of it.

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Now, in drafting the bill, we did make an error that I would like to acknowledge and take responsibility for and address in a clear way for members. It was our view that social workers should be able to continue to practise psychotherapy, and we had intended to do so by way of regulation on another piece of legislation. The point is that that might have been clear to us; it wasn't clear to social workers in the province of Ontario. I very recently sent them a letter—and I'd just like to read a paragraph or two from that—which clarifies that as we move this bill forward, if it is the will of the Legislature that this bill go to committee, and we would hope so, that we would have a chance to make amendments that would capture in this bill the issues related to social workers. So just a paragraph or two that would be helpful:

"I am aware of the valuable contribution made by social workers to the delivery of psychotherapy services in Ontario. Since the profession is not regulated under the Regulated Health Professions Act, "it was my intention to propose a regulation made under that act that would have permitted social workers to continue to practise psychotherapy uninterrupted. However, I understand and appreciate the concerns with this approach.

"Therefore, I am pleased to tell you that if it is the will of the Legislature to proceed to the committee stage of the legislative process for Bill 171, we intend to present a legislative amendment that will recognize the profession and ensure that those social workers who provide psychotherapy services associated with the new controlled act will continue to be able to provide these very important services" to the people in the province of Ontario.

I want to thank members from all parties who have been in touch with my office subsequent to the contact

that they've had from social workers in their ridings. We do very much look forward to the opportunity that we continue the tradition; that is, that all substantive government bills be given the opportunity to go to committee for the opportunities that are there as always, to enhance the quality of the bill.

Amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act focus on patient safety and transparency. They improve information sharing between regulatory colleges and government. Bill 171, if passed, would require all regulated health professions to post information about their members on the Web. Colleges would be permitted to inform the public that an investigation is taking place when it is in the public interest; current confidentiality legislation prohibits this. What we are really getting at is that many citizens—and there have been recent stories, as an example, in the *Toronto Star*—have sometimes been frustrated with the lack of transparency or, in other circumstances, with the slowness with which the complaints processes in the various colleges move forward. Through this bill, we're standardizing the response process. We're creating very clear timelines and expectations about appropriate response, and we're creating circumstances that will, in a very deliberate way, enhance the transparency with which these matters are addressed. We really feel that these advances are overdue and will be very beneficial.

On the day that I had the privilege of presenting this bill before the House, one of those groups that were here, which was really heart touching for all of us, was the family of a young man from down in Essex county, if I have that right, named Chase McEachern. I called him a young man, but in fact the actions he took were those of a quality of leadership beyond his years. This is really a young boy who decided to make a cause of trying to enhance the number of defibrillators that are available in a variety of establishments in the province. One of the things that we ran into was the challenge that a good Samaritan using a defibrillator in certain environments might still have legal liability. This was apparently posing a barrier for some people to bring the defibrillator into their environment. We're really proud of Chase McEachern, and we're really proud that his family is allowing amendments to stand in his name, amendments that my colleague the member for Essex first brought forward; that is, to enhance the capacity for Ontarians to be well supported by having more defibrillators in more places. This is an action that is made possible by a very young, courageous man, a boy who has passed on, and yet stands in a very profound way as a source of life for other Ontarians who will follow, and we thank them for that.

One of the things that we're proudest of in our Ontario health care system is a body that has become known as Ornge, Ornge medical transport. That's our air ambulance program. It's a world-leading program, and every year thousands and thousands of Ontarians, most of those in a very compromised state of health, are gaining advantage of the air transport capabilities of Ornge medical

transport. And we're going one step further. We're taking this world-leading capacity and the well-trained health professionals who operate those air ambulances and we will be adding over a period of a year or so 15 land-based critical care ambulances. These will augment the work that our municipal ambulance services are able to do. It will mean that in a seamless way, for those people who are patients of the air ambulance, in many, many cases in centres in Ontario, their care will be continuous as they are transferred to the Ornge-operated land ambulances that are designed specifically for critical care. What we're really talking about here is that in those hospitals in Ontario that have the mission of dealing with our patients who are most ill, we will be adding land ambulance capacity in the form of critical care land ambulances that will be part of the Ornge medical transport system. It will mean that that world-leading critical care capacity will be extended even further, meaning that this seamless service will enhance the quality of care for our patients.

The changes to the Ambulance Act will enable the establishment of a new integrated air and land ambulance system. That's what I was speaking about. This proposed new system would improve patient safety, provide faster transfers, cause less strain on hospital resources, and reduce demands on local ambulance services.

So we have one of these beautiful circumstances where we're going to enhance the quality of care that we're able to provide for our patients while at the same time helping to take back some of that care from our municipal providers. Sometimes it meant that a nurse or a doctor from a hospital might have to step into an ambulance operated by a municipality. We hope that with these critical care land ambulances, the cases where that is required will diminish, at obvious benefit to all.

I said to my colleagues that I'd speak for about 15 minutes. It's a substantive bill and it could warrant much longer talking from me, but no one wants that.

So I just want to wrap up—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Now I'm being heckled by my own side.

I want to say, in conclusion, what I worked to say at the beginning, and it's just a word of thanks. A tremendous amount of work went into this bill. For anyone who has been stuck with the challenge of trying to understand it, I think they would acknowledge that there is a lot of content there in each and every one of these places, addressing a very crucial element of what makes our health care system work like a system. Accordingly, I want to recommend this bill to all members of the Legislature for their consideration. I hope that the debate will be a helpful one. And, as always with legislation that I have had the privilege of bringing forward, we'll be looking for an opportunity to take this bill to committee. We will look forward in that environment to working with colleagues on all sides of the House to bring forward whatever enhancements might be possible to make an important bill even better.

I thank all members for their time and attention to this matter.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): It gives me great pride, and it is an honour, to speak on Bill 171, an act to improve health systems. It's just another piece in the plan, another giant step towards transforming our health care system, our commitment to public health care. I commend Minister Smitherman for his remarks, for his work in his fourth year now as Minister of Health, and also his staff whom he mentioned—Abid Malik, Laurel Ostfield and others—who have worked so hard on this piece of legislation to make it just right.

Through these years, Minister Smitherman and the McGuinty government have always focused with unwavering strength and purpose towards patient-centred health care. Bill 171 brings many components to that, established by Minister Smitherman in his remarks.

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In the remaining time, I'm going to be speaking to three very important and exciting parts to this bill: public health agencies, the introduction of four new licence-granting colleges and improvements for the optometrists. These three different components are intended to keep Ontarians safe from any infectious disease and to give people the knowledge that alternative medicine practices are licensed and safe in the province of Ontario.

This bill introduces the creation of the first ever arms-length public health agency. This agency would operate parallel to the world-renowned Centers for Disease Control, the CDC, in the United States of America. This centre, known as the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, would be a centre for specialized research and knowledge of public health, specializing in the areas of infectious disease, infection control and prevention.

The Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion was called for in the Naylor and Campbell reports after both SARS and legionnaires' disease outbreaks in 2005. This new health agency would be accountable to both the people and the government by way of reporting directly to the minister and to the board. Furthermore, it will be responsible for constant public reporting via reports on the health of Ontario, public health performance and infection control, and other issues pertinent to public health; also, an annual report and audited financial statement for tabling in this Legislature. An annual business plan, which would include amongst other things a three-year rolling budget, will be presented to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

This new agency would act in unison with the purpose of strengthening disease control and improving public health administration. It's imperative to have this new agency in our province. It allows our province to continue to be a leader in medical research and innovation. It also allows for the people to have an independent voice when it comes to responding to health pandemics such as Norwalk and SARS.

Let's look at how this came about and how future threats would be addressed in this province. The de-

velopment of the proposed agency came about after two high-profile reports, from 2003-06, the Naylor and Campbell reports, called for the establishment of a public agency. Disease outbreaks all called for the creation of an arms-length public health agency. The chief medical officer of health's first independent report in this Legislature, which we all heard, also referenced the importance of establishing such an agency.

On June 22, 2004, the commitment to create a health protection and promotion agency was made in Operation Health Protection, a three-year action plan "to prevent threats to our health and to promote a healthy Ontario." In that plan, the government committed to establishing a new agency and a formal board structure by 2006-07. The core activities would be to include specialized public health laboratory services, infection control and communicable disease prevention, emergency preparedness assistance and support, as well as risk communication, research and knowledge transfer, and surveillance and epidemiological analyses.

In 2005, the agency's implementation task force was established to make recommendations to the government on the design and implementation of the new agency. In its final report, the task force described how the agency could strengthen health protection and promotion activities in Ontario, modernization of laboratory services and provide greater access to scientific expertise and technical support for local public health units, other health care providers and ministry partners.

For the public to feel assured of what is happening, public reporting is paramount in this legislation and as the task force moves forward with this agency. So in accountability, the board of directors would set the strategic direction for the agency based on government priorities, the agency would report to the minister through its board chair, and the agency's chief executive officer would have overall management responsibility for operations. There would also be public reporting.

Now, there have been questions: the question of the chief medical officer's role in this new agency. These will be answered by how the chief medical officer would be able to work within this agency and with the agency. What would happen is that they would provide technical support and operational response to assist surge capacity in the event of public health emergencies or infectious disease or other outbreaks. The chief medical officer of health, or her or his designate, would also be entitled to attend and participate in board meetings but would not vote.

This strengthening of disease control would allow the government to ensure more efficient and effective distribution of medical health supplies when regular procurement processes are unable to meet demand in a public health emergency, which we have seen. This would include the power to procure, acquire or seize anti-toxins, antivirals, immunization agents, antibiotics and other pharmaceutical agents and/or medical supplies, subject to reasonable compensation.

The improving of this public health administration would create a statutory position of an associate chief medical officer of health.

Just recently, we also regulated—the minister spoke to this—an alternative therapeutic profession here in the province of Ontario, and that was traditional Chinese medicine. This regulation of traditional Chinese medicine gave Ontarians confidence in traditional Chinese medicine, because it doesn't allow anybody now to call themselves a practitioner without meeting proper requirements and standards. This gives us, the people, an informed choice as to what is out there, and people can be more assured of safety. The regulation of these health professions would provide assurances of high standards of care for Ontarians who choose these approaches to health care by requiring practitioners to meet standards and qualifications and to be accountable to a regulatory college, delivering to patients the same protections and assurances that they receive regarding the practice of other regulated health professions.

Let's look at the four that are coming forward in this piece of legislation: naturopathy, homeopathy, kinesiology and psychotherapy.

The practice of naturopathy is to assess disorders and dysfunctions and provide treatment using naturopathic techniques to promote, maintain and restore health. Now, there will be a number of protected titles here. "Naturopath" would be a protected title, as a "drugless therapist." Authorization to use the "doctor" title was also provided to traditional Chinese medicine.

Homeopathy would be a joint college with naturopathy. The practice of homeopathy is the assessment of body system disorders and treatment using homeopathic techniques to promote, maintain or restore health.

Kinesiology has a stand-alone college. The practice of kinesiology is the assessment of human movement and performance and its rehabilitation and management to maintain, rehabilitate and enhance movement and performance.

The fourth college: psychotherapy as a stand-alone college. The practice of psychotherapy is the assessment and treatment of cognitive, emotional or behavioural disturbances by psychotherapeutic means delivered through a therapeutic relationship based primarily on verbal or non-verbal communication.

Also, within the last three colleges that I spoke to, "homeopath" would be a protected title, "kinesiologist" would be a protected title, "psychotherapist" would be a protected title. As well, "registered mental health therapist" would be a protected title.

These four non-medical alternative ways of healing have become popular choices with so many Ontarians. For that reason, it would be wise for these four practices and the people who work within these fields to be licensed, not only to bring legitimacy to their practices and allow the people to make proper choices but to give the people an authority to file grievances and complaints against members who practise with malice.

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This government has always been committed to delivering a better health care system so that the people of this great province will be able to get the treatments they need and the professionals can do more for their patients.

To achieve this goal, Bill 171 proposes to enhance the services of optometrists also. The amendments would allow improved access to vision services and reduce wait times for the treatment of some eye conditions by permitting optometrists to prescribe selected drugs for certain conditions such as eye infections. Granting optometrists this authority to prescribe will, for one thing, increase access and convenience for many patients across this province. Patients in underserved areas will have more timely access to treatment if they require a prescription, making Ontario a more attractive place for optometrists to practise.

In closing, I have to say that Bill 171 will strengthen and enhance our health care system, enforcing a public health care system that we all cherish, but also allowing for greater scope and more alternative medicines that are available in all communities throughout Ontario.

So I would hope that this piece of legislation gets support from all members in this House because it would go a long way to improving our health care system.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech by the Minister of Health on Bill 171, the Health System Improvements Act. I look forward to speaking with the minister about the most recent health-related issue in east Parry Sound–Muskoka, and that is the challenge that Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is facing with its deficit situation and the tough choices it's dealing with. Particularly, right now, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is trying to balance its budget and address what I believe is an over \$1-million deficit. They are trying to save \$150,000 in the way they deliver lab services, so that would mean cutting out community lab services, and that would affect Burks Falls, Huntsville and Bracebridge. This is a very important issue in my riding. I attended a radio show last week on it. I attended a public meeting on the issue. I would just question whether it will save the health system any money by making this change. Certainly it will save Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare \$150,000 if they make the switch, which would mean that instead of community lab services being done in Huntsville and Bracebridge hospitals, they'd be couriered to Brampton, where Gamma-Dynacare would perform the lab services.

As I say, it's clear that this will save Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare \$150,000. I doubt whether it would save the actual health system any money at all and it would very much affect health care in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. So I look forward at the first opportunity to have a chance to speak to the minister about this issue.

I have spoken to the board chair, Mr. Ken Black, about it and want to pass on some suggestions and con-

cerns that were expressed to me. So I'll look forward to speaking to the minister at the first opportunity.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I'm going to have a chance to speak at greater length this afternoon in my leadoff about the various schedules in the bill, and I hope we get it all done today too.

I want to deal with schedule A right now, though, in case I don't have the chance to do that in the remarks later on. This has to do with the changes to the Ambulance Act which would essentially establish a new air-land ambulance system to transfer critically ill patients with critical care paramedics so that you've got the right mix of health care providers moving critically ill patients so as not to put a strain on doctors and nurses in the system by involving them in having to travel in air ambulances or land ambulances.

I want to bring to the attention of the minister what is happening in Thunder Bay right now, because it's quite contrary to the system that he's trying to establish here under schedule A. In fact, right now in Thunder Bay, guidelines for airlifting non-critical-care patients have recently been changed by Ornge—this goes back to December. It now means that those private airline companies that have been contracted by Ornge who had been using their own advanced-care paramedics to move these patients have now been told that they have to carry nurses from the attending hospitals instead.

Lori Marshal, who is the regional vice-president of patient care services at Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre was interviewed about this and said very clearly that this is posing a tremendous challenge to Thunder Bay Regional Hospital because they already have a scarcity of nurses in the system, and they can ill afford to now have a nurse travel by air ambulance for a patient who is not critical in order to attend at a hospital somewhere in southern Ontario.

Thunder Bay Regional transports 500 non-critical patients every year. They are travelling to Toronto, they are travelling to Hamilton, they are travelling to Ottawa etc. This is a huge strain on the Thunder Bay Regional Hospital. We checked with the hospital today and the criteria have not changed. So as we move forward with changes to the Ambulance Act that affect critical-care patients, we really need to be doing something to ensure the mix around non-critical-care patients is much better so as to not put a strain on hospitals like this one.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Bill 171 is a series of measures about openness and transparency. Bill 171 will provide Ontarians with greater access to more health professions. All of us as MPPs on occasion deal with constituents who feel ill-served in the health care system. Those people often find the complaints process within the various health professions 'regulatory colleges to be frustrating, time-consuming and opaque.

Bill 171 sets up a new medical review audit process and review board. Bill 171 implements the recommendations of the Cory report. Bill 171 establishes the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, an entity that would perform functions similar to the Centers for

Disease Control in the USA so ably described by my colleague from Mississauga East just a few moments ago.

Finally, we as members are aware of the valuable contribution made by social workers to the delivery of psychotherapy services in Ontario. Since the psychotherapy profession is not regulated under the Regulated Health Professions Act, Ontario has proposed a regulation under that act that would have permitted social workers to continue to practise psychotherapy uninterrupted.

The minister has heard the concerns of Ontario's social workers. Should this bill go to committee, the minister has already written to social workers stating an intention to recognize the profession and to ensure that those social workers who provide psychotherapy services associated with the new controlled act will continue to be able to provide these very important services in Ontario. In short, it will be included in the legislation.

This answers some of the fundamental issues facing Ontario, particularly in the Health Professions Act, and it's one reason that I hope all parties in this House will grant it speedy passage.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I'm not sure how to interpret the previous speaker's comments about whether or not this legislation should go to committee and expressing the wish for speedy passage, because I haven't had the opportunity to read the bill. But I note that it is what we would all describe as an omnibus bill. It is amending 42 separate acts and has, I think, enormous potential to attract a great deal of interest from a large number of stakeholders in the health care sector and beyond. So I think it's fair to say that clearly the opposition parties are going to want this bill to go to public hearings, extensive public hearings, and perhaps well beyond the boundaries of the great city of Toronto.

The problem, of course, is that bringing in a comprehensive piece of legislation like this at such a late stage in the mandate of the government is problematic, to say the least. When we take a look at the fact that we're looking at—what?—five months, probably, before we're effectively into the election campaign, and the writ period itself starting in September, maybe a little over five months. How many weeks do we have in terms of the sitting of this place? Plus there's the fact that we as members do not like to have committees travelling while the Legislature is in session. So I think it's going to present some challenges.

As the House leader for the official opposition, I think our critic and members of our caucus are going to want to see a whole range of people who should have an opportunity to be heard on this before we finalize and pass this significant legislation.

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The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Mississauga East, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Fonseca: I'd like to thank all the members who spoke to Bill 171 right now: the member for Leeds–Grenville, the member for Mississauga West and the member for Nickel Belt, as well as Minister Smitherman.

Bill 171 is about access to health care. It is about looking at protecting Ontarians, making sure that our health care system is as safe as it can be, giving Ontarians assurances but also broadening the scope and availability of health care in all communities across Ontario. It's about addressing some of the outbreaks that we've had, like SARS, and making sure that the people of Ontario know that there is a plan in place and everybody is ready for anything that may affect the province of Ontario, affect Ontarians' health, affect our economy etc. Working with a world-renowned centre like the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States of America, making sure that we have all those best practices in place here is vital.

I know that many constituents in my community have often come to my office talking about—let's bring up the optometrists. Many times they will have to wait to get particular drugs to help with their eye condition, having to go and see an ophthalmologist, where we do have shortages. Allowing the optometrist to prescribe drugs will open up access. That is just one little example of how this piece of legislation will take giant steps to helping all Ontarians with access to health care.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to stand down the leadoff speech by the member from Waterloo.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Simcoe North is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow the opposition to stand down the leadoff speech by their critic. Is there consent? Agreed? Agreed.

I return to the member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Dunlop: I'm very pleased to rise today to make a few comments on Bill 171. I know that our critic, a former Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the member for Waterloo, will want to spend quite a bit of time on this bill, An Act to improve health systems by amending or repealing various enactments and enacting certain Acts.

I can tell you, first of all, that this is a very thick bill as you look at it and it does an awful lot of work as we try to improve our health care system. It was introduced on December 12, 2006. There are a number of points I would like to put on the record here.

The bill would add four regulated health professions under the Regulated Health Professions Act, creating three new colleges. These professions include naturopathy, homeopathy, kinesiology and psychotherapy. The bill would enhance the services that optometrists, dental hygienists and pharmacy technicians and interns provide. The bill provides a new medical audit system for physician billing to OHIP. The bill establishes protection from civil liability if automated external defibrillators were used in good faith to save a life. The bill proposes the creation of an arm's-length public health agency—the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion—which would be modelled after the Centers for Disease Control. The bill would facilitate the implementation of a new integrated air ambulance system to manage transfer

of patients between health care facilities. The bill proposes the transfer of legislative responsibility for five categories of non-residential and seasonal-residential drinking water systems from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the bill also amends a number of other miscellaneous acts.

This omnibus bill amends 42 separate acts and has the potential to involve the largest number of stakeholders ever on any health care bill. The PC caucus is concerned because the McGuinty Liberals waited until nine months before an election to introduce a bill that deserves much more adequate public consultation. The PC caucus is concerned that Ontario social workers have been excluded from the regulation of psychotherapy in the proposed act. The PC caucus finds it surprising that the Liberal government did not adopt the recommendations of the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council in this regard, since the exclusion would seriously impact access to mental health services. The public can be sure that the PC Party will be putting forth amendments to address these concerns, and of course the minister has brought up some points today on that.

I do want to say on behalf of our caucus—and I know the minister earlier thanked Justice Campbell for his dedicated work in this area. I can tell you that after the SARS incident in 2003, I'm surprised that it's taken this long to get this bill on the legislative calendar.

Now, we talked about the inclusion of social workers. The minister brought this out in his statements, and I notice in one of the responses by the parliamentary assistant that he brought it out as well. Quite frankly, we've received literally dozens—most of the PC caucus members, and I'm assuming most of the members in this House, have received a lot of feedback from different health care professionals concerned about the inclusion of social workers on this particular bill.

I want to read a typical letter into the record, because I know that we've been talking about going to committee. I'm not sure when that will in fact happen, whether we'll see this bill passed before the end of this session, but I do want to include a letter. I think I received probably a total of about 40 of these letters. I want to read this one in particular into the record so that it's in Hansard and we can refer back to this, because we do want to see these amendments made when we go to committee, if in fact we do get there.

This letter is from a young woman in our riding. Her name is Wendy McQuaig, and she's a therapist. I'll read it:

"Dear Mr. Dunlop:

"I am writing to express my concerns regarding Bill 171—The Health Care Improvements Act (including the Psychotherapy Act). As a psychotherapist in private practice in Orillia, I am the first to support the need for regulation and standards in the profession of psychotherapy. I have a B.A. from Queen's University and a master's degree in social work from the University of Toronto. I am a long-standing member of both the On-

tario Association of Social Workers and the College of Registered Social Workers. I have been practising as a psychotherapist in Simcoe county for 17 years and participate in ongoing training and conferences in the mental health field. I also present seminars and write on mental health issues.

"Unfortunately, Bill 171, in its present form, has failed to protect anyone. In order to design legislation that was meaningful, the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council was formed in 2006. This council was made up of professionals from various qualified mental health disciplines (including social work) to provide relevant input regarding a psychotherapy act. In April 2006, this council produced a report called Regulation of Health Professions in Ontario: New Directions. This report recognized social workers as one of the key professions qualified to provide psychotherapy as social workers are already regulated through their own college.

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"Despite this initially collaborative process, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has unexpectedly opted to exclude qualified social workers. This occurred in the 11th hour and unbeknownst to both the College of Social Workers and the Ontario Association of Social Workers, who sat with others at the table, carefully putting forth well-researched recommendations. This goes against the recommendations of the well-thought-out New Directions report. Instead the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care opted to include only doctors, nurse practitioners, psychologists, and occupational therapists (a very small portion of those providing psychotherapy). In other words, although it is proposing that psychotherapy be a controlled act, it has not made an amendment to include qualified social workers, as it has for these other disciplines.

"If this bill were to be passed in its current form, it would cause a mental health crisis and a huge disruption in services. There are approximately 16,000 social workers presently working in the province of Ontario. A very large number of them (approximately 80%) are providing psychotherapy. In fact, social work is the largest single discipline providing this service in North America. For example, services in the area of adult mental health, children's mental health, marital, family and individual counselling, addictions, child welfare, hospitals etc. are largely provided by social workers.

"I have been a psychotherapist in Simcoe county for the past 17 years. In that time, I have worked with approximately 25,000 people on a range of mental health issues (i.e. family issues, separation/divorce, blended families, depression, anxiety, stress, self-esteem, parenting issues, anger management, abuse, grief issues, marital counselling, teenage problems etc.). Most of my referrals are from family doctors or pediatricians. However, I also get numerous referrals from schools, lawyers, employment assistance programs and the general public. My clientele includes doctors, lawyers and other professionals and their families, as well as factory workers, teachers, self-employed business owners etc. In other

words, anyone in the general public who is struggling with an emotional issue may call to set an appointment. I see 30 clients a week times 48 weeks a year. That totals approximately 1,450 sessions a year. There are many qualified social workers doing the same thing.

"Who else will provide these services? For example, in the growing city of Orillia, there are approximately 35,000 people. Doctors are so busy they can barely keep up, in fact much of rural Ontario is a medically underserved area. How will they have time to begin providing psychotherapy and is this what the taxpayer is paying them to provide? In Orillia, there are very few nurse practitioners and isn't their role to provide medical services to offset the already overstretched doctors? In Orillia, there are three psychologists (one is limited only to working with addictions). In addition, an important part of the work of a psychologist is to provide psychological testing. There are two consulting psychiatrists who consult in Orillia, one or two days a week at the most. Psychiatrists are only accessible by a medical referral. As to occupational therapists providing psychotherapy, I have yet to hear of any doing so in the Orillia area.

"Bill 171 is not a well-thought-out bill in its current form. It needlessly screens out a large, qualified discipline which is already providing these services and leaves little in place to fill the gap. In addition to leaving large numbers of the population underserved for mental health services, it also is bound to create significant changes, perhaps even unemployment for thousands of social workers. I am asking that amendments be made to include qualified social workers as the HPRAC originally recommended.

"If these changes are not brought about, I fear there will be a huge crisis in mental health services in Ontario, not to mention 16,000 outraged social workers picketing Queen's Park."

That is signed by Wendy McQuaig. She has a BA, an MSW and an RSW, and she's a psychotherapist in the city of Orillia. She has been to see me a number of times on this issue, and so have a number of her colleagues.

So when the minister knew the bill was coming up—I guess he found out last week when we found out what was going on in the House this week—suddenly yesterday a letter appeared from the minister. I have a copy of it here. It was sent out to a number of social workers across the province, trying to defuse them. I see they've defused it in a couple of the comments coming from the Qs & As after the minister's speech. The letter was addressed to Dan Andreae, the president of the Ontario Association of Social Workers, and Rachel Birnbaum of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. I think that was primarily the main concern with this particular piece of legislation that I was hearing back from the folks in my riding. However, I think the minister, at the very last second, tried to take credit for completing the job when in fact the job is not really completed. We're going to have to go back to committee and make sure that people from right across the province

are heard on all aspects of this bill because it does amend a number of pieces of legislation. I know that our members are already looking forward to providing these amendments to that piece of legislation, but my guess is that the government will likely have some amendments to be made as well.

I can say that as well as that, I had a number of other letters from folks right across my riding; in fact some of them from outside of the riding as well. I have one here about the homeopathy act. Where's this one from? I won't get into any more reading of the letters, but I can tell you that from right across the province we've received a number of comments from folks who are very concerned, particularly around the social work inclusion.

I don't have a lot more to say on it at this point. This is a bill that has a lot of other amendments that amend a number of other pieces of legislation. My concern is that there's so much detail, and we may find problems with other pieces of legislation, so that I'd hate to see this bill rush through this House. First of all, if it's time-allocated, it gets to committee and, as the member from Leeds-Grenville mentioned, we probably won't see it travelling very far. I would think at the very least we would like to see it maybe even delayed for some time.

That's all I really had to say on the bill today. I can tell you that we realize there is a need for this type of legislation but we want to make sure we get it right. I think that's what's really important. When the social workers brought out their concerns, that's one part of the legislation that needs to be corrected. Is everyone else happy with it? I'm not sure. Only very detailed committee hearings where people can come forward either here at the Park or throughout the province—only time will tell how important that will be.

One point I want to raise too—we're talking about the health of our communities and the health care of our province in general. I was really very pleased yesterday when the federal budget was brought down in Ottawa and our friend Jim Flaherty, the former member from Whitby-Ajax, brought forward spending on a national water strategy. I can tell you that in that national water strategy, there was an allocation of \$12 million over two years to go towards the cleanup of Lake Simcoe. I can tell you that we debated in this House a resolution I put forward last year following a private member's bill. I want to say, on behalf of the residents of the riding of Simcoe North, I think that's a great first step. Here we've got the federal government coming in on the quality of water in Lake Simcoe.

I think it is great for the health of our communities that we have that vision coming from Ottawa. I can only hope that following the leadership we've seen from the federal government in Ottawa, we see the same kind of leadership on Thursday afternoon at 4 o'clock coming from the provincial government. Our province created the greenbelt legislation, which has made some huge fast-tracking of development and the need for more health care, but at the same time we have to keep our people healthy with clean air and fresh water. I want to thank

Jim Flaherty and Prime Minister Harper for bringing forward that national water strategy. I think it's a great opportunity for Ontario to set an example as well, to get out there and clean up some of our most valuable resources like the clean water we have in lakes like Lake Simcoe.

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The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: In response to the comments made by the member from Simcoe North, I wanted to say that I got a copy of this letter that he referred to as well in his remarks; I got a copy earlier this morning. I noted that it didn't have a date on it, which made me wonder about the rush that went on to try and get it out the door before we actually dealt with this legislation this afternoon. It reminded me as well of what happened when we dealt with Bill 50, the traditional Chinese medicine bill, when the same type of thing happened and a letter went out to the committee members before we had to deal with it again on third reading as a result of all the concerns that were still being expressed after we had gone to committee for that particular bill.

I am pleased to see that the government finally understands that this is not going to be dealt with by regulation—that is not satisfactory to social workers or to social service workers—and that the time is going to be taken to fix this properly, which of course requires time for amendments in committee. We're going to need to go to committee in order to do that, and we're certainly asking for that and reinforce that position today.

How the government is going to amend the bill remains to be seen. They may want to amend the social work act itself to add to it the controlled act of practising psychotherapy. That's the same kind of formula they're using to amend the Medicine Act, the Nursing Act and the Occupational Therapy Act. I don't know if it can be done with the social work act, but that might be the way that they respond to it.

What I do hope now happens is that the government actually has some conversations about the proposed legislative amendments before we get to committee so that we can get this sorted out and so we don't have to go through what we have just gone through, which is literally getting hundreds and hundreds of letters from very concerned social workers, who very clearly were left out of the original bill. I don't know how that happened. I don't know who's responsible. It certainly was a mistake. I'm pleased to see that the government, even at the 11th hour as we start to debate the bill, has got a letter out now to those same individuals to say that this is going to be fixed.

Mr. Fonseca: I am glad that the member for Simcoe North and the member for Nickel Belt brought up the letter to social workers from Minister Smitherman. I'm just paraphrasing here: "Since the profession is not regulated under the RHPA it was my intention to propose a regulation made under that act that would have permitted social workers to continue to practise psychotherapy uninterrupted." That is from Minister Smitherman.

But I want to focus here on the positives; let's focus on the positives. Ontarians will benefit from the creation of a public health agency that will bring experts in the public health system together; increased infectious disease management/control and emergency preparedness by ensuring public health officials have the necessary powers and authority to intervene in an emergency; modernizing the health professional regulatory system in Ontario; and the creation of new regulatory colleges.

Another positive: more efficient ambulance critical care patient transfers between health care facilities. I know this will help the members' ridings in Simcoe North and Nickel Belt.

Another positive: a revised medical audit system for OHIP payments.

Another positive: clear protection from civil liability for certain persons who use portable heart defibrillators to assist in an emergency.

Bill 171 is here to benefit all Ontarians. Yes, it will go through the legislative process. Yes, it will go to committee. Yes, we will look at amendments to make it better. But let's not forget what we are here for: We are here to make a stronger, better Ontario, to strengthen public health care. This is what Bill 171 will do. If we focus on those positives, we will be able to overcome many of the obstacles that we see in front of us.

Mr. Miller: It's my pleasure to add some comments to the speech from the member from Simcoe North. At the end of his speech, he got a little off topic and started talking about Lake Simcoe, but I know he's been fighting hard for his riding of Simcoe North and I know he's very pleased to see that federal announcement of \$12 million to improve the water quality in Lake Simcoe.

We're talking about Bill 171, the Health System Improvements Act. I want to again highlight some of the health challenges in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, particularly on the east side of the riding, affecting Burk's Falls, Huntsville and Bracebridge, and the challenges Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is facing. That's the newly amalgamated board between Huntsville and Bracebridge. They're facing a significant deficit challenge that has caused them to look at changing the way they deliver community lab services. I have to say that I think the solution that will save the board \$150,000 won't necessarily save the health system any money at all and will negatively affect health care in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I have a stack of petitions in my desk. There was a lot of competition for petitions today; I look forward to delivering those tomorrow, if I'm given the opportunity. I also look forward to having a chance to speak to the minister about this issue.

The new board, under the directorship of former MPP Ken Black, has been looking and doing work to save duplication. They've been working hard on trying to eliminate the deficit, but they're facing some real challenges. They've asked for peer review, and I would hope that the minister would grant that peer review. It had been declined once, but that peer review would help

in terms of looking very much at the specifics of the challenges they're dealing with. I hope the minister will look into this situation.

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): I'm delighted to be able to offer some brief comments on Bill 171. This is in fact my first opportunity to rise in this House in debate.

Applause.

Mr. Ferreira: Thank you. As we've heard from members on both sides of this House, there are indeed some refinements and amendments that can be made to this bill. In fact, we heard that from the minister himself. That shouldn't be much of a surprise, given the very wide scope of this omnibus legislation. It includes 17 different and disparate parts that really have nothing to do with one another, aside from them being under the health care umbrella.

It's really because of that that we need, in addition to full study under committee, public hearings on this bill. In fact, our House leader has communicated that to the government's House leader and has suggested that those public hearings be heard during our constituency week break in the month of May. The hearings would allow the various stakeholders—and there are many—an important opportunity to have their feedback taken into consideration as we refine the legislation.

In particular, I want to point out some of the concerns that the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors has raised. They would see their profession changed in a significant way. I've heard from naturopathic doctors in my own riding who have asked for an opportunity to contribute, in a meaningful way, to the finalizing of this particular piece of legislation.

So I encourage members to consider that, and I want to reiterate the importance of allowing the public across Ontario an opportunity to address this bill, which has significant impact on the course of health care in the province.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Simcoe North. You have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Nickel Belt, Mississauga East, Parry Sound–Muskoka and York South–Weston for their comments on my earlier comments. I want to in particular congratulate the member from York South–Weston on his election to this House.

The member from Mississauga East said, "Let's just talk about the positives." If he's talking about health care and he wants to talk about positives, maybe what he should do is sit in his constituency office some day and answer the phone, because about half of our calls—maybe even a little more than that—are on health care and how people are upset with health care.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): It used to be 90% of the calls.

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Mr. Dunlop: Now we're hearing whatever he calls himself from St. Thomas babbling away again. He can't

take any of this; he can't wear it. The reality is that there are a lot of negatives in the health care system. They're paying a health premium; the average citizen is paying about \$900 a year more in taxes. Where is it going? Where is this money being wasted—on government ads? We've seen the government ads. On glossy brochures?

There are literally millions of dollars being wasted in this system. That's why there are negatives in the system. That's why we have to concentrate on some of the negative things that are happening, like a letter that came out yesterday. A letter came out yesterday to respond to the social workers. They never had the courtesy to put the bloody date on it. They didn't put the date on the letter. They responded at the last second. The minister has been getting these letters since December 12; that's when the bill was introduced. The social workers have been complaining since December 12 about this. That's why we bought it up today.

Interjection.

Mr. Dunlop: Okay, he can go ahead and take his rabies shots if he wants, but the reality is, there are problems in the health care system and there are negatives in the health care system.

The Acting Speaker: I have to ask the member for Simcoe North to withdraw that.

Mr. Dunlop: I will withdraw that, very reluctantly.

The Acting Speaker: Just withdraw.

Mr. Dunlop: I'll withdraw that.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: I'd ask the Minister of Labour to come to order.

Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It's a pleasure for me to participate in the debate today. I will be doing the leadoff for the New Democratic Party and I will take an hour. So there you go. I just wanted to give everybody a bit of a warning.

I want to begin by saying this, on a general level: I remember a time when Liberals hated omnibus bills; it wasn't so long ago, when the Tories were in government. In fact, for the eight years that the Tories were in government and brought forward omnibus bills, there were any number of members, including the government House leader—whom I have lots of time for; I want to put that on the record—who had nothing but negative things to say about that: how undemocratic they were and how unwieldy they were and how there were always surprises hidden in them and how we shouldn't work that way.

But I guess that was then and this is now, because here we are dealing, of course, with a Liberal omnibus bill at the 11th hour, with about six months to go to the next election, with a minister who surely wants this bill to pass, and we have at least 17 different schedules involving probably 42 different acts. The only thing that holds them together is that in each of them the words "health care" appear somewhere. But there certainly isn't some seamless movement between all of them that ties them together. It really is in essence a lot of the promises that the Liberals made during the election that haven't been

kept yet and that they're trying to keep now before the next election is called.

Having said that, I want to deal with some of the specific concerns in a couple of schedules and proposals for amendments that I hope the government will take seriously. Of course, I have asked my House leader to ask the government House leader for public hearings. I hope that will take place during the constituency week, because it is clear that amendments are required to deal with this bill.

I want to deal, actually, with the schedules from near the end to the front for no particular reason except that schedule Q, which deals with the psychotherapy act, has probably been the most controversial. That's probably where I want to start, because I have the most to say in this regard.

It's true that psychotherapy is not regulated now. I am a member of a political party that has generally supported regulation; indeed, under our government in the 1990s we regulated some 21 health care professionals. So we recognize that regulation in and of itself enhances professionals and their role in the health care system and, secondly and most importantly, protects members of the public from someone just hanging out a shingle and practising whatever they want to practise even if they're unqualified and incompetent. So we are supportive, and we're supportive of the regulation of TCM, for example, as well.

So I'm supportive of schedule Q, which will allow a college of psychotherapists of Ontario to be established. The college is going to regulate the establishment of the registration requirements, develop and maintain quality assurance programs, develop the standards of practice for its members, and initiate processes for complaints and discipline. Indeed, the college will be responsible to regulate the conduct of its members to ensure that the highest quality of care is provided and to protect members of the public from those who would be incompetent or unqualified practitioners.

This all flows, I think, from recommendations that were made by HPRAC. Indeed, the minister, in February 2005, made a referral to the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council about psychotherapy. I want to read that into the record. He sought advice from HPRAC on the following:

"Whether psychotherapy should be an additional controlled act under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, and if so, which regulated professions should have psychotherapy in their scopes of practice and how standards should be set and measured; and

"Whether psychotherapists should be regulated under the RHPA as a profession, what their scope of practice should be and what controlled acts they should be authorized to perform, as well as any protected titles, and whether it is appropriate that psychotherapists be regulated under an existing profession-specific act."

The response that came back from HPRAC was the following:

"HPRAC's central response is that psychotherapists and psychotherapy should be regulated in Ontario under

the Regulated Health Professions Act with a new profession-specific statute, the Psychotherapy Act, that would include an enforceable scope of practice and title protection; and those existing health regulatory colleges whose members practise psychotherapy should develop comparable standards of practice for their members."

That's somewhat similar to what we saw on the regulation of traditional Chinese medicine in terms of ensuring that other colleges whose members practise TCM—more specifically, acupuncture—should develop comparable standards as well for their members.

Two specific recommendations that I want to focus on: The first was recommendation 3(2): "No person other than a member in good standing of the college, the College of Psychologists of Ontario, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, and the College of Nurses of Ontario who has met the qualifications specific to the practice of psychotherapy as established by their college shall engage at any time in any of the activities as set out in (1)." That was to do with what psychotherapy was.

I want to say that with respect to that particular recommendation, I agree and I disagree with it. I agree with it because I think that social workers should have been part of this bill, and they weren't. I disagreed with the recommendation because it left out a whole category of essential mental health workers, mental health counsellors, who provide important services in northern and rural Ontario and who were not going to be able to provide those services to particularly vulnerable clients if the HPRAC recommendation passed in the way it did.

The second recommendation that was made that I agreed with was that "complementary amendments should be made to the Nursing Act, 1991, Medicine Act, 1991, Psychology Act, 1991, and Social Workers and Social Service Workers Act, 1998," and those complementary amendments would, of course, allow members in those colleges to continue to practise psychotherapy. The government has also added occupational therapists, which I agree with as well. So I agree with that particular recommendation.

I want to return, though, to the recommendations, because many of us have received letters from social workers which have said, "We need to return to the original HPRAC recommendation and implement that." If that had happened, I can tell you that any number of practitioners in my own riding would not be able to practise again, and those are specifically practitioners who work with a range of mental health organizations, who do a range of mental health counselling, whose patients rely on them, particularly because access to psychotherapy per se in northern Ontario and rural Ontario is pretty restricted.

The first letter that I got about that occurred even before the legislation was tabled, as kind of a warning for me to say, "If the HPRAC recommendation is implemented in legislation in its current form, all kinds of people in northern Ontario are going to be cut off

access.” So I just want to read part of this letter. It was from Dr. Josie McKechnie, who is a Ph.D. and C.Psych. in Sudbury.

“I am a registered psychologist and provide psychotherapy to adults in the region of greater Sudbury. I am a member of the College of Psychologists of Ontario and am writing to you in regards to recommended changes to the Regulated Health Professions Act....

“Although I am in support of ensuring that the providers of mental health services are both clinically competent and ethically sound, I have serious concerns for how this proposed legislation may restrict access ... for our northern community. Given the reality that a majority of individuals are not eligible for financial assistance for services, either due to lack of third party insurance coverage (which is very limited even when available) or because of lack of coverage for psychologists providing services in non-OHIP centres, the proposed revisions to this act are likely to place an onerous burden upon those who are already in emotional distress....

“I believe that all mental health services, not just psychotherapy, must be regulated in order to protect the public. People receiving mental health care are vulnerable at the time of their lives when they seek assistance or treatment. All mental health professionals, regardless of the titles they use, pose a risk of harm to the public due to the nature of their work. Thousands of mental health workers who are not full-time psychotherapists must continue to provide much-needed services and this broad spectrum of professionals needs to be regulated.

“I also believe that it is in the public interest for Ontarians to have the choice of a wide range of mental health services to ensure that:

“—the pool of qualified providers is not diminished;

“—services are available in remote areas;

“—services are available in languages other than English and French; and

“—culturally competent services are accessible to diverse communities.”

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She said, “Regulating only psychotherapists, rather than a broad range of mental health professionals ... will seriously curtail the choice of ... mental health services for scores of Ontarians across the province. Thousands of professionals, who are qualified and experienced mental health practitioners, but not psychotherapists per se, will be legally barred from continuing to offer services that deal with cognitive, emotional and behavioural disturbances....

“In addition, quality mental health services are desperately needed in communities across Ontario. Any law that curtails the availability of these services and creates barriers to access, especially in remote areas and for diverse communities, is not in the public interest. As well, the government cannot justify the expense of prosecuting mental health counsellors when these scarce

resources are better spent on providing a broad range of quality mental health services to Ontarians....”

Therefore, any “legislation must:

“—adopt a broad definition of psychotherapy that captures all mental health workers, including those who are currently unregulated;

“—regulate all persons providing mental health services; and

“—require currently regulated health professionals who are practising psychotherapy to meet qualifications and accountability measures specific to psychotherapy.”

I’ve got lots of letters like that from professionals in northern Ontario, and I know the government also got recommendations or letters from the Coalition of Mental Health Professionals, which represents about 13 very different groups, all of whose members provide counselling services to very vulnerable people. The message was the same: Don’t go with the HPRAC recommendation in this particular case, because you will really bar a number of people from access and you will put many people who are providing important services now out of business.

I was pleased to see that, in fact, when the legislation came forward in Bill 171, the protected titles included not just “psychotherapist” but also a protected title of “registered mental health therapist.” The bill also says that no person other than a member of the college shall hold himself or herself out as qualified to practise as a psychotherapist or a registered mental health therapist. I am trusting that this will not compromise now the ability of qualified providers like Sister Josie and others to continue the delivery of important services, especially in my communities and many others in northern Ontario.

I want to return to this particular regulation, though—not the particular regulation, but the recommendation, which spoke specifically to social workers—because I agree that social workers as a group of workers who are now practising psychotherapy need to continue to be able to do that, and clearly the ball got dropped by the government in this regard because, as currently drafted, of course, the bill does not reference social workers among those who can practise psychotherapy. It also does not provide for a complementary amendment to the Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998, to provide them, for example, with access to the controlled act, as other amendments are doing for other health care professionals who are providing psychotherapy.

This first came to my attention January 2, when my colleague Mr. Prue sent me a letter from one of his constituents, Mr. Polski, who said the following:

“As a social worker who is your constituent, the omission of the recognition of the profession of social work as a provider of psychotherapy is an unjustifiable error that will affect me personally, and my ability to earn a living.... The exclusion of social work from this bill is unfair and unreasonable.”

As a result of that, we sent that letter to the minister’s political staff, saying to them, “Surely you can’t mean what this says,” because from our view it clearly does cut

out social workers, and I can't imagine that that is what you were interested in doing. We sent that because we were receiving letters like that and others; for example, this one, which I also want to read into the record and which said the following:

"I am a member of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, and an oncology social worker providing psychotherapy services to malignant hematology patients and their families at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto. I am extremely concerned about the impact of the proposed Psychotherapy Act, 2006 on my profession and on the provision of psychotherapy services to cancer patients and their families....

"I am particularly concerned about the exclusion of social workers from the proposed Psychotherapy Act, 2006 because a significant component of my work as an oncology social worker involves the provision of psychotherapeutic services to patients facing illnesses that include leukemia, lymphoma and multiple myeloma. I also provide care for patients who have undergone ... [an] allogenic bone marrow transplant. Treatments can prolong life but the inescapable reality is that many patients I work with, including men and women of the age ranges from 17 through to the late 80s, diagnosed with malignant hematological disease are dealing with the reality that their disease is incurable. Adjusting psychologically and practically to this reality presents significant challenges. Risk factors related to age, life stage, prior history of illness or trauma, more general health-related anxiety, current levels of social support as well as barriers related to language, literacy, socioeconomic status, and immigration status can exacerbate patients' vulnerability at these times."

She went on to say very clearly, in regard to all of the work she tries to do with these patients, many of whom are palliative and aren't coming out of the hospital, that recognition "of social workers as key professionals providing psychotherapy services in the proposed Psychotherapy Act, 2006, is necessary to ensuring appropriate patient access to these services throughout the health care system."

Based on that letter and many others, we contacted the minister's political staff and sent them a copy of the letter that we had from Mr. Prue and said, "Please check with the bureaucratic staff, because we can't believe that this is what you mean to do." To his credit, Abid Malik, who works in the minister's office, sent us an e-mail back on February 6, thanking us for sending the letter over and for bringing this to his attention. He said the following: "I want to assure you that the minister is aware of the issue; he highly values psychotherapy services provided by social workers to their clients and intends that social workers who provide psychotherapy will continue to provide the service if Bill 171 is passed."

However, in the same letter, of course, it was made clear that the minister wanted to do that via regulation. He said the following:

"Social workers are regulated in Ontario under the Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998, not the

RHPA. In the result, social work is not a regulated health profession and social workers are not authorized to perform a controlled act under the RHPA. However, the minister has the power to make regulations under the RHPA exempting a person or activity from the provisions of section 27(1) of the RHPA." That's the controlled act section. "Section 27(1) of the RHPA restricts the performance of a controlled act to certain persons, including members of a regulated health profession who are authorized to perform them." So it was clear that the minister was going to try and fix this through regulation.

We sent this letter in its entirety out to the many people in the field who were contacting us to say, "Clearly the government has erred in the drafting of this, and the government's proposal to fix this is by way of regulation." That didn't take us very far at all. We heard back from many social workers after that who said, "No, that's not good enough. We want to be included in the act. We don't want to have our provision of service based on a regulation that can be changed every Wednesday at cabinet. We want to be included like the others in an amendment to the bill."

Indeed, on the website for the Ontario Association of Social Workers, the association says just that: "OASW is currently working with a government relations firm as well as lawyers to seek amendments to the Psychotherapy Act with the goal of having social work formally recognized as the fifth regulated profession referenced in the act. We are communicating directly with both Minister Smitherman ... and Minister Meilleur ... and are working with other senior staff in the MOHLTC to find a solution to this problem. We want full recognition of qualified social workers to provide psychotherapy, and authorization of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to set standards to regulate psychotherapy."

They weren't the only ones who wrote to us and said that regulation isn't good enough. I just want to read from the very end of a letter that was sent to us from Ruth Cummins in Thunder Bay, who said the following:

"In summary, Minister Smitherman, I am asking that you work with Ontarians around two main concerns. Firstly, that you immediately seek an amendment to the Psychotherapy Act that is in line with the HPRAC recommendations and one [that] provide[s] a solution that does not create a further split between our profession and those professions falling under the RHPA. I ask that you and Minister Meilleur work together to ensure that social work is included as the fifth regulated profession listed in the Psychotherapy Act as qualified to provide psychotherapy. Social workers must be fully recognized as providers of psychotherapy and the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers as having the authority to set standards...."

The government really did need to take a serious second look at how to fix this by way of amendment versus by way of regulation. So I was very pleased to receive just this morning, on the eve of the start of the

debate of this particular bill, a copy of the letter that the minister sent out yesterday to many social workers to say that he recognized that this was a problem, that he agreed that the way to fix it was not via regulation, and that the government was going to look towards amendments to bring these changes about.

I can say that in talking to the president of the association of social workers two weeks ago, we asked them to work with their lawyers to give us potential amendments to the bill that we could move forward in the event the government didn't. So I hope that people are working with the right people now so that the amendments that come forward are going to do the trick and are going to, by way of amendment in law in this legislation, actually allow social workers the ongoing right to provide psychotherapy services. We look forward to having that debate and discussion and seeing those amendments when the committee sits.

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Next I want to deal with schedule P, which is the schedule involving the regulation of naturopathy and homeopathy. The schedule regulates both of those professions. There will be a new college established called the College of Naturopaths and Homeopaths of Ontario. Previous to this, naturopaths had been regulated under the Drugless Practitioners Act for the past 80 years. I want to read into the record some of the concerns about Bill 171, schedule P, which have been raised with me recently by Michael Heitshu, who is the director of policy for the Ontario Association of Naturopathic Doctors. I want to read these into the record. These are the following concerns from the association.

(1) "Establishing a scope of practice statement that is a reduction of what naturopaths have under the Drugless Practitioners Act, and which does not accurately describe the essential approach of naturopathic medicine, which is to treat the whole person, not just symptoms. It is critical to the profession that the scope statement maintains the integrity of the philosophy of the profession. To be accurate, the scope statement must include the role of naturopaths in providing diagnosis and must include disease as part of the scope, as recommended by HPRAC. An improved scope statement will also help the public with the important objective of clarifying the differences between homeopathy and naturopathic medicine.

(2) "Taking away the ability of naturopaths to prescribe, dispense, sell and compound many natural health products that are currently available to patients, and that naturopaths are highly trained to use safely and effectively. HPRAC recommends that naturopaths be granted this controlled act. Without this controlled act, naturopaths would only be able to use natural health products intended for over-the-counter sale to consumers to treat patients, meaning we could no longer offer the optimal care that results when naturopaths can customize a treatment plan based on the full range of natural medicines that are currently available. Naturopaths have been prescribing, dispensing, selling and compounding

natural medicines as part of their current scope of care in a safe and effective manner.

(3) "Limiting naturopaths to providing a 'naturopathic diagnosis,' which places unreasonable limits on the ability of naturopaths to perform diagnosis as patients have come to expect. It is a significant concern that a naturopathic diagnosis may have no relevance for other practitioners, which could substantially limit opportunities for collaboration if the naturopath's diagnosis cannot be accepted. As with the scope statement, the controlled act does not include diagnosis of a disease, only a disorder or a dysfunction. This is a substantial limitation on what naturopaths can diagnose. We believe diagnosis should happen within standards established by the regulator, as with MDs, dentists, optometrists, ... psychologists and chiropractors.

(4) "Outlining a format for title protection that will result in Ontario's naturopaths being forced to use the title 'doctor of naturopathy' that has never been used before in Ontario. This title is currently only used by poorly trained and unregulated practitioners in other jurisdiction who do not qualify to be naturopaths and would therefore reduce the confidence of the public in Ontario that they are seeing a regulated health provider. Bill 171 should continue to use the titles already established in Ontario: 'naturopathic doctor' and 'doctor of naturopathic medicine.' It is also critical that the premise of Bill 171 to enable" naturopaths "to use the Dr. abbreviation continues to be upheld."

That was an analysis of the concerns from the association of doctors of naturopathic medicine or naturopaths that was sent to me on March 12, so it's quite a recent analysis of the bill. I know that the association sent out a press release when the bill was released indicating its support for the bill, but this has come in after, so I assume they have had a chance to go through it more thoroughly, particularly more thoroughly through schedule P, and these are some of the concerns that they have raised with me and that I trust they will be able to raise during committee hearings. I hope the government is going to be open to some of the amendments that they have listed in their brief.

I next want to deal with schedule M, which involves amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act. There are significant amendments in this section. Many of them are prompted by the report that HPRAC entitled *New Directions*. I want to put on the record now some of the suggestions that have been made to me both by way of brief and in a meeting held with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Many of them are technical amendments, but I think that the government would want to take a look at them because they could be easily incorporated into the bill.

First of all, subsection 14(1): Under "Continuing jurisdiction," "The amendment proposes to allow a person whose certificate of registration has been revoked or who has resigned to continue to be subject to the jurisdiction of the college for misconduct or incompetence referable to the time when the person was a member and may be investigated.

"Currently, members who were revoked or who have resigned are subject only to misconduct, not incompetence, proceedings.

"A person whose certificate of registration 'has expired' should also be included in this provision as there have been circumstances where the college has sought to take action notwithstanding that a member had allowed his/her certificate to expire."

The recommendation made by the College of Physicians and Surgeons is, "Add persons whose certificates have expired to s.4(1) to continue to be subject to the jurisdiction of the college for misconduct or incompetence referable to the time when the person was a member."

Subsection 23(6), with respect to the registrar: "The amendment would provide the discipline committee with a new ability to order that the registrar not disclose certain information to the public or post it on the college website if more than six years has passed since the information was prepared or last updated.

"The public would be better protected if the information regarding the member that would not be disclosed after six years had passed was a discipline finding in respect of which the penalty ordered was only a fine or a reprimand, as per the CPSO bylaw.

"Recommendation: Add 'if the information regarding the member was a discipline finding in respect of which the penalty ordered was only a fine or reprimand' to the end of s.23(6)(a) to allow the registrar to disclose to the public or post on the college's website serious information if more than six years has passed since the information was prepared or last updated."

I think that's an important provision for the government to make. The government talks about making this information more available to the public—not only CPSO information, but information with respect to all other colleges and members who are disciplined. One of the areas we need to make a change in to make sure we are allowing all of the available information to be posted that should be posted would require a change in this regard. I hope the government will take that into consideration.

Subsection 25(6), the complaints section: "Amendment provides for the registrar to give notice to the member within 14 days of receiving the complaint.

"Currently, the legislation does not specify a set time period for the provision of notice" to the member of a complaint.

"Imposing a time limit may be problematic in certain cases where substantial investigation needs to be done prior to notifying the ... member.

"For example, a sexual abuse, fraud, or serious prescribing complaint may require the college to obtain an appointment of investigators by the ICR committee and in some cases perhaps even a search warrant to obtain original medical reports prior to notifying the member. These processes will generally take more than 14 days.

"In these kinds of cases, if the member under investigation is aware that a complaint against him/her has been submitted to the college before the investigation commences, the integrity of evidence may be jeopardized.

"Recommendation: Remove the provision requiring the registrar to give notice to the member within 14 days of receiving the complaint so that necessary investigations can be completed prior to notifying the member or provide for an exception to the general 14-day rule where a longer period of time is required in order to preserve the integrity of the investigation."

What we're talking about is making sure that evidence is not destroyed when a member becomes aware of a complaint that has been registered against him or her. If the college has gone through cases before—and they assured me that they have—where gathering that evidence to protect it and protect its integrity has taken longer than 14 days, then we should find a way to have flexibility around that timeline. I understand why there is a timeline, which is to move those processes forward. But if in the process of doing that, you end up compromising evidence that needs to be used, then we haven't served anybody very well. I trust that the government's going to be interested in looking at how we can be more flexible around that particular timeline provision.

Subsection 25(1) has to do with the alternative dispute resolution mechanism: "Alternative dispute resolution with respect to a complaint should not run concurrently with an investigation as it will be extremely resource-intensive for the college, the member and the complainant to have two very similar concurrent processes.

"The college, the complainant and the member will all be duplicating efforts and doubling their use of resources if required to undergo two processes about the exact same matter currently.

"Thus, the investigation should not commence until the ADR process is complete.

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"Further, requiring all information obtained during the course of the ADR process to remain confidential places the regulator in an untenable position should it become aware of serious information during the ADR process and be precluded from further investigating or acting upon it.

"The college, as regulator and in order to protect the public, cannot ignore information that it has been given, regardless of where it comes from."

So the recommendation is to amend "section 28(2) so that a referral to an ADR process does affect the time requirements under section 28; the computation of time shall not start unless and until the ADR process fails. Separate timelines can be introduced for the ADR process," if necessary. "Add 'an alternative dispute resolution with respect to a complaint should not run concurrently with an investigation to section 25.1.'"

Under section 26(1)2, the college notes, "After investigating a complaint or considering a report, an ICR panel should refer the member to the fitness to practise

committee for incapacity proceedings, instead of to a panel of the ICR committee as the bill proposes.”

“In general, section 26(1) is a great improvement and will allow us to better protect the public.

“One significant issue with the provision is that it is unclear from section 26(1)2 and section 58(1) whether the legislation contemplates two different panels of the ICR being involved.” If that is the case, “there is no benefit to the change from our current process of having a board of inquiry and a panel of the executive committee.

So the recommendation is to “[r]emove ‘ICR committee’ from section 26(1)2 and replace it with ‘fitness to practise committee,’ thereby allowing an ICR panel to refer a member to the fitness to practise committee for incapacity proceedings after investigating or considering a report.”

Three more that I want to point out are under section 38(1)1: “The proposed amendment would allow the chair of the discipline committee to select a separate panel from among the committee members to consider pre-hearing matters.

“There is a possible problem with specifying that different pre-hearing panel may be appropriate for some motions.

“Due to the shortage of available council members, requiring separate pre-hearing panels would make it more difficult to obtain panels for hearings.

“Currently, common-law principles must be followed in this regard, and these suffice to ensure a fair process.”

So the recommendation is to remove that section from the bill.

Under 58(1)1, the section on incapacity: “The proposed amendment allows for a panel selected by the ICR committee to inquire whether a member is incapacitated.

“The provision does not explicitly state, but seems to suggest, that two separate ICR panels have to be involved.

“Requiring two separate panels would not allow the process to improve, and will in fact would make it more difficult to administer than as occurs with the current BOI process.”

So the recommendation is that section 58(1)(b) should be amended to provide that the ICR committee can inquire into issues of incapacity if these issues are raised by any complaint or report.

The final provision I want to focus on is one that involves search warrants, and I want to focus on this because I think the government is going to have to clarify its wording in this particular section.

CPO, in its brief, said to me that subsections 77(1) and (2) make changes to the current search warrant process and that one of the changes, as they read it, “is that a search warrant will no longer provide access to a dwelling or part of a dwelling that is not the place of practice of the member. The problem is that often members who practise in part of their homes maintain records or other relevant information in their basements

or other portions of their homes that are not in their ‘place of practice.’

“We have recently had two cases in which members were alleged to have been practising in contravention of terms on their certificates, in which they practised out of their homes but kept records and other supplies and information in other portions of their home.

“Search warrants permitted us to access these records, and it is very important such an ability is maintained.”

So they suggest that we remove “other than a dwelling or a part of a dwelling that is not a place of practice of the member” from that section.

I read the section over a couple of times, and on the first couple of readings I thought the college was right and that indeed that is what the section says, that unless we were talking about a member’s place of practice, you couldn’t get a search warrant and you couldn’t go and investigate. And then I read it a few more times, because we had the same kind of discussion on Bill 140, dwelling search warrants etc., and when I reread the provisions, it seemed to me that the provisions perhaps were allowing search warrants to be executed for places of business and for dwellings and for homes. So if CPO is confused about this and I’m confused about this after reading it many times, I think it warrants the government to have another second look at this just to make it clear that you can get a search warrant to look at both the place of business—the place of practice—and a member’s home if you’re trying to collect information. I don’t think, as it currently stands, it’s very clear, and it would be good to have some amendment around that particular section to make it very clear that that is what in fact we are allowing college members to do. I’m sure that is what the government intends, but I have to say that in its current format it is not clear, and I suspect CPO is probably not the only college that has read it in that light and thinks that there is a problem with that particular section now.

I want to deal next with schedule K, which establishes the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. This schedule establishes a new agency as a crown agency to provide scientific and technical advice and to support those working to promote and protect the health of Ontarians. An additional set of responsibilities include “to carry out and support activities such as public health research, surveillance, epidemiology, planning and evaluation.” The new agency will be called the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion.

I want to spend some time on this particular one because OPSEU has raised concerns with the government in a letter that I saw, dated December 12, about the agency. I want to share those concerns and put them on the record, but I think those concerns need to be put into some context. So I want to deal with the context first.

In the final report of the agency implementation task force, which was released on March 26, the task force recommended that the new Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion be established with arm’s-length relationship from the government. I should say that the task force was established at the direction of the

minister. A number of very well-qualified, very significant, very important people in health care who have been a part of that spent many hours responding to the government's question of: Should there be an agency; what should it look like; what should the governance structure be; what work should they do; how should the board be selected etc.?

They reported in their final report that there be an arm's-length agency and that it be established as a scheduled agency of the crown. As I said, many important people, many very qualified, hard-working people were members of the task force. They devoted months in time and a lot of energy to providing the government with information on how to start the new agency. I want to note in particular that one of the members is my own medical officer of health for our public health unit, Dr. Penny Sutcliffe, for whom I have enormous respect.

However, I have to say that the recommendation for the agency to be arm's length is, frankly, at odds with recommendations that were made by the Honourable Mr. Justice Archie Campbell in his volume 3 of the final report of the SARS commission, on page 1161. This was tabled in December 2006. I want to quote from his remarks because he does make it clear that his interest is in an agency that is very much attached to the government, not an arm's-length agency, and he outlines the reasons why. I'm quoting from his report.

"Although there is much wisdom in the proposal for an Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, the recommended structure fails to take into account the major SARS problem of divided authority and accountability.

"As the commission noted in its second interim report:

"... the SARS response was also hamstrung by an unwieldy emergency leadership structure with no one clearly in charge. A de facto arrangement whereby the chief medical officer of health of the day shared authority with the commissioner of public safety and security resulted in a lack of clarity as to their respective roles which contributed to hindering the SARS response."

"An important lesson from SARS is that the last thing Ontario needs, in planning for the next outbreak and to deal with it when it happens, is another major independent player on the block.

"The first report of the agency implementation task force said:

"A body at arm's length from the government was recommended in the Walker, Campbell and Naylor reports, was a commitment in Operation Health Protection and aligns with the successful experience of the INSPQ (L'Institut national de santé publique du Québec)."

"The commission in fact recommended a much different arrangement in its first interim report, and warned against creating another 'silo,' another autonomous body, when SARS demonstrated the dangers of such uncoordinated entities:

"First, the structure of the new agency or centre, which will combine advisory and operational functions,

must reflect the appropriate balance between independence and accountability whether it is established as a crown corporation or some other form of agency insulated from direct ministerial control.

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"Second, it should be an adjunct to the work of the chief medical officer of health and the local medical officers of health, not a competing body. SARS showed that there are already enough autonomous players on the block who can get in each other's way if not properly coordinated. There is always a danger in introducing a semi-autonomous body into a system like public health that is accountable to the public through the government. The risk is that such a body can take on a life of its own and an ivory tower agenda of its own that does not necessarily serve the public interest it was designed to support."

"Consequently, the commission"—that is, Justice Campbell's commission—"recommended that the chief medical officer of health have a hands-on role at the agency, including a seat on the board."

In the proposed legislation, of course, the chief medical officer of health does not sit as a full member of the board and sits at the meetings when the board and for how long the board says that is appropriate. So that is quite contrary to what Justice Campbell recommended.

"The agency implementation task force took a completely opposite approach, recommending against giving the chief medical officer of health a seat as a voting member of the board, and recommending a very autonomous role for the agency.

"This proposed arrangement ignores important lessons from SARS.

"The commission, far from recommending a completely arm's-length organization, pointed out the need for the chief medical officer of health to be in charge with the assistance of the agency, which should, albeit with a measure of policy independence, be operationally accountable to the chief medical officer of health."

I think it's important for members to have that background, because the government has made a decision, which is up to the government, to move with a recommendation that was made in the final report of the agency implementation task force; that is, to set up an arm's-length agency, a scheduled agency of the crown. The government has also gone with the recommendations of the implementation task force with respect to the role of the chief medical officer of health, which is that he or she will not be a voting member of the board. The government can do that, but it needs to be pointed out that clearly that is a contradiction from what was proposed by Justice Archie Campbell. I think it's important to note that this report came out in December 2006, when Justice Campbell had had time to look at the proposed governance structure that had been put forward to the government by the agency implementation task force. So the government has made a choice, and that is the government's choice. Having said that, serious concerns remain about that choice, especially in light of all the

work that was done by Justice Campbell and especially in light of his concerns about the government's proposal in Bill 171, which he articulated as late as December 2006.

This leads to the concerns that OPSEU has raised with the government. In a letter dated December 12, 2006, OPSEU says the following:

"OPSEU endorses the key recommendations of both the Campbell and Walker reports that the government:

"—strengthen the authority and operational independence of the chief medical officer of health ... while ensuring his/her continued accountability to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care;

"—substantially increase the funding and resources available to the Ontario public health laboratories to ensure they have the medical and technical expertise and operational capacity to respond to future public health crises; and

"—strengthen the links and improve coordination between the public health labs and both the ministry's public health branch and broader public health and health care systems.

"We therefore support the call by both the Campbell commission and the Walker panel:

"—to create a new Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion as an agency of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, under the operational authority of the CMOH and the direction of a competent board appointed by the Minister of Health; and

"—to transfer the Ontario public health laboratories to the new agency.

"However," says OPSEU, "there is no evidence that the government's proposal to establish the new agency outside the Ontario public service will help address any of the serious issues identified in the Campbell and Walker reports.

"On the contrary, such a move would undercut Justice Campbell's call to balance the need for independence of the CMOH and the new agency against the need to ensure their direct accountability to the minister and the public. It would reduce direct ministerial accountability for the new agency's operations. It would reduce the transparency of the agency's operations while making it much more difficult to improve coordination between the public health labs, the ministry's public health branch and the rest of the health care system. It would do nothing to ensure that the new agency is adequately funded. Finally, it would create additional uncertainty and dislocation for the almost 600 OPSEU members who work in the public health labs—and increase the risk of service disruptions and other problems during this important transition.

"In contrast, establishing the new agency within the OPS would allow the government to ensure the necessary independence and expertise of the new agency's board and senior management while preserving direct accountability to the minister and the public for its operations. We therefore urge the government to create the new agency within the Ontario public service—and to work with OPSEU members to strengthen the province's

system of public health surveillance while ensuring stability for the hundreds of skilled workers whose skills and expertise will be central to the new agency's success.

"In the meantime, whether the new agency is established within the OPS or outside it"—and it looks like it's going to be outside of it—"OPSEU is seeking immediate commitments from the government that

"—Bill 158, which will restore successor rights to crown employees, will be passed and proclaimed as soon as possible, and before the transfer of any OPS employee to the new agency;

"—Successor rights will apply to all OPSEU members affected by the transfer to the new agency;

"—No OPSEU member will be surplusaged as a result of the transfer, either by the government or the new employer;

"—Affected OPSEU members' entitlements and participation in the OPSEU pension plan will be grandfathered, in accordance with the outstanding amendment 12 to the OPSEU pension plan text."

I raise those particular concerns because I think it is important to note that there were two choices that the government had at its disposal with respect to the establishment of this agency. Everybody agrees with the need to establish it. The issue is really around its governance structure. There certainly is a difference of opinion about how to do that between the implementation task force and Justice Archie Campbell. If the government, as it appears to have done, is going to use the implementation task force recommendation, then I trust that the government will work with OPSEU as seriously as it can and as soon as possible to ensure that all of the commitments that it is looking for are met, because if it's a crown agency outside of the public service—and it looks like that's what it will be—of course there will be a number of people who will be affected, and that may have a direct impact on the good work that they currently do, particularly in the public labs.

So I say to the government, the choice has been made. I certainly hope that you can figure out how to accommodate Justice Campbell's concerns, which were repeated again only as recently as December, and I certainly trust that you are going to accommodate OPSEU's concerns about what will happen with a crown agency that is outside the OPS.

Finally, in respect to this particular section, I do think it's important to talk about funding, because Dr. David Walker, in the final report of the expert panel on SARS, said the following: any new agency would need an operating budget of \$45 million—that was in addition to the existing base budget associated with the current laboratory operations, so an additional \$45 million of new money—a capital budget that would need to be in the order of \$3.5 million in design and development costs, and an additional \$35-million allocation to put it all together.

Although the government announced the new agency, the government has yet to talk about the funding, either operational or capital, that will be associated with the

new agency. It's clear that those costs are going to be substantial, and we wait to hear some kind of announcement from the government of just what those allocations will be, both with respect to capital and operating. But I certainly hope the government is going to pay heed to the work of Dr. Walker in his final report and put in place the kinds of sums of money he says are necessary to make sure this agency will operate as it should.

Finally, with respect to the transfer of the public health laboratories to the new agency, this was also recommended by the implementation task force. I think that makes good sense, but it is also clear that they said a couple of things had to happen before that transfer would ever occur. I just remind the government of what the implementation task force said and hope the government is committed to this: that we need to reshape, retool and refocus the Ontario public health labs so individuals in the system have the tools, the processes and the supports necessary to cope with the challenges and excel; that we need to deepen and strengthen the emphasis on and the opportunity for research and academic partnerships; that the Ontario public health laboratories remain intact and are transferred intact to the new agency; and, finally, that there be immediate establishment of a laboratory transition team to aid in the planning.

So as of this part of the schedule, if the bill is passed, the new agency will be created, and it will be incumbent upon the ministry to work as soon as possible after that to establish a laboratory transition team to aid in the transfer of the public labs to the new agency. I hope that the government will do that. We have incredible expertise in the many skilled workers who work in the public laboratory system now and we do not want to lose any of that skill or expertise. We want to keep it all and maintain it, and we want to, frankly, enhance their roles. The government needs to send a signal to these members very quickly after the bill is passed that the government is intent on having that transition team in place to make sure that those skills remain in place and are transferred to the new agency.

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I want to deal very briefly with schedule F, which is the Health Protection and Promotion Act. There are a number of amendments in this particular section. Subsections 29(1) and 29(2) are amended to allow reporting by medical officers of health to health facilities with respect to communicable diseases that are acquired at facilities and to allow for the issuance of orders against either institutions or public hospitals in order to deal with those communicable diseases. It was interesting that in the *Globe and Mail* earlier this month, on March 10, the headline was "Hospitals Must Report Superbugs by Next Year." It says very clearly, "Starting in January, 2008, the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation will compel virtually all acute-care hospitals—in addition to those nursing homes and other institutions seeking a stamp of approval—to provide the rates of MRSA or C. difficile.

It's important to note that this reporting mechanism to the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation is

voluntary; there's nothing mandatory about it. Given, frankly, how deadly these two superbugs have become, I think it's becoming incumbent on provincial governments to ensure that there is reporting of this in hospitals and long-term-care homes as well. In fact, right now in both Manitoba and Quebec, the provincial bodies, hospitals etc., are compelled to report that to public health agencies. So under this particular section, where we're going to expand the roles of the public health officials with respect to communicable diseases, I suggest to the government that it would be well worth your while in a regulation under the Health Protection and Promotion Act to make it mandatory for both hospitals and long-term-care homes, for example, to report incidences of both C. difficile and MRSA to the relevant local public health agencies so that people are aware of what's happening and that public agencies can work with the institutions or the homes in question to try and deal with these very serious outbreaks. It can't be put forward as an amendment to the bill, it would have to be done as a regulation, but given the increased responsibilities in this section for both medical officers of health and public health staff, I think the government would be well advised to take a look at what Manitoba and Quebec have done in this regard and move similar regulations under this act with respect to these particular two new superbugs.

I want to deal now with two more schedules. Schedule D includes the Health Protection and Promotion Act. Under this particular schedule, the responsibility for small drinking water systems is going to move from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health. That includes small drinking water systems in bed and breakfasts, churches, community centres, private cottages, municipal airports, motels, resorts and gas stations. Under the changes proposed, the assessment of these systems is going to be added to the list of mandatory health programs that have to be carried out by boards of health.

Safe drinking water is a serious issue. We only have to think about Walkerton to understand that. Of course, public health units will have a very serious responsibility in this regard as the assessment of these systems and the ensuring that they are safe will be a mandated program. The problem is that public health units right now in the province are under great pressure to deliver on the current list of mandated programs. It's not clear to me that public health units are either going to get the staff or the financial resources necessary to actually ensure that this very serious new mandatory program is going to be undertaken.

On the contrary, it's very clear to me that the government's cap of 5% to health units in 2006 has caused a serious problem in the ability of health units to meet the mandated programs now; many of them are not. I just want to read from a letter that was sent from the Association of Local Public Health Agencies to the then chief medical officer of health, Dr. Sheela Basrur, on May 23, 2006, with respect to the cap and the ability or

inability of public health units to then undertake their legislative responsibility to carry out mandatory programs. She says:

“On behalf of member medical officers of health, boards of health and affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies ... I am writing to urge you to reconsider the current policy direction of reviewing board of health grant requests that provide for up to 5% growth in 2006.

“Board of health chairs and MOHs received the letters informing them of this policy direction on March 3 and 4, respectively. Given the January to December fiscal year for boards of health, most had already completed their budget cycle by the time this policy direction was received. We are asking that the 65% MOHLTC grant for all board of health approved budgets be fully funded. A cap on public health funding growth at this time is not acceptable as it will jeopardize the ability of boards of health to fulfill their obligations under the Health Protection and Promotion Act and mandatory health programs and services guidelines.

“For the past five years health units have been on a path to achieve 100% compliance with the minimum standards outlined in the mandatory health programs and services guidelines. Boards of health remain committed to this goal and are working towards levels of health unit funding that will achieve 100% program compliance. Limiting board of health grants at this time will have a negative impact on the ability of health units to reach the 100% compliance they have been working to achieve.”

So it's very clear that the government's decision last year, in 2006, to limit the growth in public health spending, particularly on mandatory programs, to 5% had a serious impact on many of the 36 public health units in the province. Many were already not meeting the mandatory programs they're supposed to deliver by law. Many more were put in a position where the good work they were trying to do was totally undermined by the government's cap.

My serious concern with respect to this particular schedule is that transferring the responsibility for small drinking water systems to public health units without a significant financial commitment or a significant commitment of new inspectors—which in itself is another financial commitment around human resources. If the government doesn't do that, then public health units across the province will fail to be able to deliver this new responsibility. They will fail completely. I have looked and listened and tried to see what kind of commitment the government is going to make in this regard to public health units, and I fail to see what that is. In the most recent conversation that we had with ALPHA, with the executive director, she also pointed out that there is still not enough core funding to provide mandated programs, never mind trying to find the funds necessary to undertake this new added mandated responsibility.

So I await hearing from the government about the levels of funding that it intends to allocate to public health units to allow them to undertake this new addi-

tional responsibility. I haven't heard that yet, and it is imperative that the government make an announcement and that that funding be adequate enough to allow public health units to take on this very important responsibility.

I want to end with schedule B, which affects the existing health professions. There are a number of professions in this particular schedule whose legislation is being amended, and I just want to focus on the Nursing Act, 1991. To put it into context, on October 23, I wrote to the Minister of Health and I asked him to make a number of legislative and regulatory changes that, if put in place, would impact positively upon acute-care nurse practitioners under the extended class of registered nurses. The legislative changes included, for example, title protection for nurse practitioners, additional new controlled acts, including prescribing a drug, the setting or casting of a fracture of a bone or a dislocation of a joint and the expansion of existing controlled acts, for example, allowing nurse practitioners to have an enhancement around the ordering of application of energy.

The regulatory changes that I asked for included regulation 965, the Public Hospitals Act; regulation 552, the Health Insurance Act; regulation 107, the Regulated Health Professions Act; and regulation 682 of the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act. All of these changes, if implemented, both legislative and regulatory, would allow registered nurses in the extended class, particularly those providing acute care, to really care for in-patients in hospitals, to allow them to order and apply a broader range of form of energies and to expand their authority to order tests.

Since my letter of October 23, 2006, my follow-up letter of November 27, 2006, and my follow-up letter of February 19, 2007, I still have not had any response from the government about the government's intentions in this regard. I look to Bill 171 and see that the only thing that the government has essentially moved on in all of these matters is the title protection of “nurse practitioner.”

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The government had a golden opportunity in this legislation to move forward the other legislative changes that nurses have been asking them to move forward on. In particular, on the matter of prescribing a drug, nurse practitioners want to be able to prescribe a drug that is needed for the patient, not what appears on a list right now in regulations, which is the only list they're allowed to work with. They don't get it in this bill. They don't get enhanced controlled acts or new controlled acts and certainly none of the regulations that I've talked about have been put into effect.

If all of these had been done, it would really enhance the role of nurse practitioners, especially those who are working in acute care. I regret that the government didn't use Bill 171 as the opportunity to bring forward the legislative changes that had been required to see this done in order to give nurse practitioners the ability they need to truly perform within their scope of practice.

In conclusion, let me say that of course we will want public hearings on this bill. I have asked my House

leader to communicate that to the government House leader. I understood he did that today. I hope we can do that during the constituency break. There are a number of amendments I've put forward today. I hope that the government will be open to listening to them and making sure that they pass.

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Natural Resources. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the minister or the minister's parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I don't see the minister, and I don't believe his parliamentary assistant is here.

Interjection.

Mr. Miller: The parliamentary assistant? Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I filed for a late show on December 14, 2006, after Minister Ramsay's response to my question about funding for the Ministry of Natural Resources fish and wildlife programs or, rather, his lack of a response.

In December, I asked about funds for conservation officers, specifically operational funds for things like gas. As you know, conservation officers have been holding bake sales and bottle drives to raise money. I also asked the minister about funds raised through licensing fees going into the special purposes account. Originally, he told me that licence sales were down, when in actual fact they're up. Frankly, the minister didn't have any answer for where the special purpose account funds are being spent. The ministry is responsible for conservation and enhancement of our valuable natural resources—all of our resources, including fish and wildlife.

There is no denying that the fish and wildlife programs under the Ministry of Natural Resources haven't been flatlined; they've been cut by 6%, and special program funding has been cut by 49% in 2006-07. These aren't my figures; these come directly from someone uniquely situated to know, and that is the former director of the fish and wildlife program at the MNR, Andy Houser. He spoke last week to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, and in that speech he said that the MNR is bankrupt.

Resource management is essential to the wellness of all people in our society and to the economic prosperity of communities right across our great province, but your staff don't have the resources to conduct critical in-

ventories or assessments or to do on-the-ground management activities. Base program funding decreased by almost 6% in 2006-07. Base operating dollars were decreased by 7%. Special funding decreased by 49%, from \$15.33 million last year to \$7.86 million this year. Between 2003 and 2007, the contribution from the consolidated revenue fund to base operation programs funding decreased by more than 30%. Specifically, in the northeast region, North Bay to Sault and northward, base operating funding decreased by 23.6%. Real decreases in program funding between 2005-06 and 2006-07 for the Great Lakes and hatchery programs are just over 40%.

What does this mean on the ground? It means you no longer have the resources to support small local hatcheries like the Almaguin Fish Improvement Association because you can't spare the biologist, the boat or the nets to help them with their fish stocking activities.

Let's look at another example: Crowe Lake Association where the resource—walleye—clearly needs a helping hand and the people on the ground are keen to help. In the case of Crowe Lake, the municipality has passed a resolution supporting walleye stocking in Crowe Lake. The association wants permission from the district to stock Crowe Lake using their own resources. Volunteers are being turned down and away in droves, couched behind claims that there is no net benefit for their activities.

Cuts were planned in the community fisheries and wildlife involvement program, which has historically been a great partnership between the MNR and 35,000 volunteers, taking on some 600 conservation projects. Only after intense public stakeholder pressure did you reconsider chopping funding to this program. MNR needs to embrace these opportunities to enhance our resources through partnerships, rather than to continue to discourage groups that could actually make a difference. MNR has everything to gain and nothing to lose by embracing these volunteer groups.

Ringwood hatchery is another example of a world class hatchery that was on the MNR chopping block—saved by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

The Credit River Anglers Association, among the largest non-government agencies on Lake Ontario, injected over \$3 million for forest buffer, stream remediation, fish stocking and habitat restoration. They have more than 1,000 members and 1,500 volunteers. Their association has pleaded for you to increase funding. They point out that the Peel region has but one conservation officer—an area with a population of over a million people.

Archipelago and Carling townships are asking for MNR to be a partner on Georgian Bay. Here too, only one conservation officer patrols some 100 kilometres of shoreline.

Blue Mountain's council has resorted to allocating funds to train OPP officers under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act because there aren't enough COs.

There is a new obstacle, and that is that fish hatcheries are now having to pay fees to the Ministry of the Environment, up to \$11,000.

I don't have time to talk about parks, but all I can say is that parks are for people and should be added to your endangered species list.

Minister, will you commit today to reversing your government's deep cuts in these very important programs, and will you fulfill Dalton McGuinty's promise in the election to adequately fund the Ministry of Natural Resources?

Mr. David Oraziatti (Sault Ste. Marie): It's a pleasure to be here this evening to have an opportunity to respond to the concerns raised by the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. Let me start off by saying that he has expressed concerns for both the Ministry of Natural Resources' support for the fish and wildlife program as well as our enforcement efforts. I'm going to address both of those.

Before I do that, I do want to point out that the record is very clear. From 1990 to 1994 there were 23 MNR offices closed, and from 1995 to 2003, there were 71 offices closed. So we're certainly not going to take any lessons, on this side of the House, on how to support the Ministry of Natural Resources in moving forward. I'm very proud of the record of the McGuinty government in supporting the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the very good work that they do and the ministry staff do across the province of Ontario.

Let me preface my remarks by pointing out that, like other ministries, MNR is modernizing, integrating and consolidating programs and services to achieve long-term, cost-effective results in areas that are important to the public. That means we are strengthening our resources in high-priority areas. The ministry is moving to a broader landscape and regional approach to resource management. We are encouraging greater public community involvement, and we're promoting local stewardship.

For its part, the fish and wildlife program continues to focus on high-priority items and on improving efficiencies in services. Since 2003, the program has made some significant achievements in the management of our fish and wildlife resources. Let me give you just a few examples.

Our new ecological framework for fisheries management will make angling regulations easier to understand, and advisory councils throughout the province will give anglers more input into the management of the resources. I think that's one of the concerns that the member has also raised.

We would work with partners to develop Ontario's biodiversity strategy and have started implementing the strategy's recommendations. It means we're helping to ensure that we protect the biodiversity of our native plants and animals. I'm particularly pleased that Jon Grant, a highly respected and qualified individual, has agreed to serve as the chair of the biodiversity council.

Today, we introduced legislation that, if passed would make Ontario a North American leader in species-at-risk protection and recovery. I think the minister has shown tremendous leadership on that issue, and we're going to

hear more from the minister on species at risk in the coming days.

Ontario now has a provincial conservation strategy for wolves, and we've launched the bear wise program, which is obviously having an impact.

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We've created new Sunday gun hunting opportunities in southern Ontario and developed a multi-agency chronic wasting disease surveillance and response strategy to protect Ontario's wildlife from the threat of diseases. By making changes to Ontario's moose- and deer-hunting seasons, we've enhanced opportunities and helped ensure sustainability and healthy populations. We've signed agreements with three provincial treaty organizations on the collaborative management of fur-bearing mammals. Working with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario and Banrock Station Wine, we are taking steps to re-establish the Atlantic salmon in Lake Ontario.

We're also investing \$13.2 million over three years to upgrade the Dorian Fish Culture Station. The upgrade and reconstruction will double the yearling production capacity of the station, providing specialized isolation capability to reduce fish health risks and ensure that the facility can continue to meet local and regional fish-stocking needs.

These are just a few examples of the accomplishments that we on this side of the House are proud of in fish and wildlife management and have been able to deliver under the McGuinty government.

Let me take a few minutes here to turn to the second item that the member has raised: enforcement. Compliance and enforcement are now, and will continue to be, a core function of the ministry. Given that fact, this year's budget allocation for our enforcement branch is very similar to last year's. Our enforcement program is working. Each year, special blitzes are carried out in the spring and fall. These efforts generally find that the vast majority of our hunters and anglers are law-abiding citizens. However, these blitzes are effective in finding the small minority of people who do not respect the law. For example, in October 2006, conservation officers completed an enforcement blitz in northeastern Ontario that uncovered nearly 500 violations and resulted in the seizure of dozens of illegally killed animals, including 57 moose.

In April 2006, MNR implemented a risk-based enforcement framework. Under the framework, our officers and resources are focused on areas of higher risk. Essentially, enforcement staff focus their effort on those activities that pose the greatest risk to the public, safety and the sustainability of our natural resources. The new framework focuses on the importance of outreach and education to compliance and enforcement.

It was also our government that established the MNR TIPS line—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. We have time now for our second late show.

CLASS SIZE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Oak Ridges has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Education. That member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant will have five minutes to reply.

I recognize the member for Oak Ridges.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I did express my dissatisfaction with the minister's response, and I want to restate the issue that I was putting to the Minister of Education during question period. It is a fact that after three and a half years of the McGuinty government being in office in Ontario, and after 3.5 billion additional dollars being poured into the Ministry of Education, in this province we have serious problems in our education system.

A basic, fundamental promise of the Premier in the 2003 election campaign was that this government would impose a hard cap of 20 students in the primary grades. When challenged during that election campaign that that was impractical, that that may be laudable in terms of wanting to bring class size down—and, by the way, we strongly support the intent of having smaller class sizes. But what we stated very clearly was that it would be impossible, particularly given the growth in many of the regions in this province, to have in place a hard cap on class size. As one teacher put it, "Students don't come in groups of 20." The reality is that, particularly in growing communities, school boards must have the flexibility of dealing with class size. Yet that was a cornerstone pledge of the Premier's.

What we found is that it is impossible, and this government has learned that. They're being told by school board administrators, by trustees and by teachers, "Don't go down this way of a hard cap. It's impossible. Give us the flexibility to deal with what the objective is, but help us to manage our classrooms."

Finally, after constantly asserting that the hard cap would in fact be implemented, that they would achieve it by the end of their mandate, which now is only six months away, as recently as yesterday the Minister of Education admitted that that solid plank in their election platform is broken, their promise is broken, and in fact they will not be able to achieve that. And now, against the backdrop of yet one more broken promise, I was simply asking the Minister of Education to admit that their promise of a hard cap was wrong, that they would change that policy to allow the flexibility to school boards to manage the student population in a reasonable way. The minister refused to admit that. She has admitted, finally, that their pledge will not be met—yet one more broken promise by the McGuinty government.

As we move forward, we realize that after three and a half years and \$3.5 billion more into the education budget, we have school boards across the province facing deficits; the funding formula, which was the other major plank of this government, still has not been fixed; we have ESL programs that are still being abused by school

boards because they're being forced to shift designated funding for ESL to cover off salaries and maintenance in schools. We find a government that still has not kept its promise to autistic children. We find a government that has closed 150 schools, against the backdrop of a promise that they would not do so, and the individual who would represent himself as the education Premier has an education system in disarray. The house of cards is falling, and it's falling quickly.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Guelph-Wellington has five minutes to respond.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to our record on primary class size this evening. Research shows that when classes are smaller, teachers are able to spend more time with individual students. This is particularly important when you look at the primary years, junior kindergarten through grade 3, because it's in those years that children are learning to read and acquiring early math skills. So what the research tells us is that it's absolutely critical that our youngest students get really sound foundations in reading skills in those early years, and that the kids who have better reading skills in those early years are much more likely to graduate when they get to the end of high school. The research also shows that having small class sizes at primary contributes to that future success. That is why we did in fact make a commitment to smaller primary class sizes.

Just for the viewers to know, we made a commitment to have 20 or fewer students in 90% of primary classes, with the remaining 10% of primary classes having up to 23 students. In fact, we've made some really great progress here. One of the reasons that we've made good progress on this commitment is that we also, at the same time, set up something called the literacy and numeracy secretariat, which has been doing excellent work in working with teachers around the province to improve instructional methods in reading and math skills, so that those two initiatives have worked hand in hand and we are seeing that our EQAO test scores are improving.

Back to the business specifically of class size, when we started out at the end of the government represented by Mr. Klees, we found when we came into office that only 31% of primary classes had 20 or fewer students. In fact, 36% had 24 or more students, and some of those would be as high as 30. Today, after investing \$278 million to hire 3,600 additional primary teachers, we now have 65% of our classrooms already meeting the target of 20 or less, and almost 93% have 23 or less students. In fact, only 6% are at the high end with 24 or more, and we still have another year to go.

The issue of split grades has been mentioned. The truth of the matter is that no matter what class size you choose, be it 20 or 25 or 30, students do not come in convenient packages of any size. So no matter what size you choose, you will have split grades. This is a red herring. Split grades are a red herring. So let's go back to what's really going on.

We have made a number of improvements here, and I would like to report what Michael Fullan, who is the

professor emeritus of education at OISE/UT and, interestingly, the author of the Early Years report commissioned by Mike Harris, had to say:

“Effective teaching methods involve focusing on the individual needs of each and every student. This is greatly enabled in smaller classes, and is especially necessary for meeting the needs of disadvantaged students.

“The government should move to full implementation of its class size policy. In fact, it should be commended for not just looking at the short-run benefits.

“It is because the government strategy has included improved teaching, meeting the needs of all individual students, and special attention to closing the gap that we are already seeing so many positive gains in three years.

“Thousands of more students are proficient in reading, writing and math than would have been the case; the number of schools doing poorly have been substantially reduced.

“If the government stays the course these benefits will multiply greatly for the coming years. For the first time in a decade we are seeing schools on the move in a steady upward trajectory.”

I am proud of our record.

The Acting Speaker: There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 6:45 p.m.

The House adjourned at 1823.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Ottawa–Orléans	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones		Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
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Peterborough	Arthurs, Wayne (L)		Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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of Debates
(Hansard)****Tuesday 20 March 2007****Journal
des débats
(Hansard)****Mardi 20 mars 2007**Speaker
Honourable Michael A. BrownActing Clerk
Deborah DellerPrésident
L'honorable Michael A. BrownGreffière par intérim
Deborah Deller

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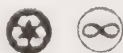
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 20 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 20 mars 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR L'INTERVENANT PROVINCIAL EN FAVEUR DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 19, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth / Projet de loi 165, Loi visant à créer la charge d'intervenant provincial en faveur des enfants et des jeunes et à y pourvoir.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I understand that when we last debated this matter, the member for Hamilton East had the floor and she has time remaining. I'll return to the member for Hamilton East.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's certainly my pleasure to continue with the remarks I was making yesterday regarding Bill 165, the bill that is meant to make the child advocate in Ontario an independent officer of this Legislature. Certainly it's an idea that has been long in the making. Let's put it that way.

As I mentioned yesterday, we were quite disappointed that it has taken the government this long to get to the point of actually bringing the bill forward. We had thought that the child advocate having an independent voice for children in this province was something that was extremely important, and unfortunately waiting till the eleventh hour in their mandate to bring it forward indicates very clearly that the government didn't really agree with the fact of the import of this particular piece of legislation.

Notwithstanding that, yesterday I spent a little bit of time speaking about some of the other challenges and problems and devastating issues that face the children of the province of Ontario, particularly those children who are caught in the child welfare system. But certainly overall there is a great deal of work that needs to be done to really effect positive change for the children of Ontario. I'm not going to reiterate those because, as I mentioned yesterday, today I want to talk about some of the more specific pieces to the legislation.

One of the things that I think is absolutely incumbent upon us is to look at the current situation of First Nations

kids and to acknowledge and recognize that the ministry, thus far, has not had a good track record—from the legislative perspective anyway—in terms of building that voice into the process and making good on commitments that had been brought forward in previous draft legislation or in the committee process in terms of legislation. So I'm not going to belabour that point, except to say that we really do have an absolute obligation to hear the voices of First Nations communities, particularly because we know that their children are significantly overrepresented when you look at the statistics around children who are in the child welfare system, and that is extremely problematic.

I also want to reiterate the idea that was put forward yesterday just very briefly, and that's the one that speaks to the vision of this whole piece of legislation and whether or not it's appropriate that a preamble be added on to the bill.

I just noticed that my colleague Rosario Marchese from Trinity-Spadina has joined me and has brought me a glass of water, which will be very helpful over the next half an hour. I thank you very much.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It's the least I could do.

Ms. Horwath: And I appreciate it.

I did want to mention that I don't think that's a bad idea. I don't necessarily think it was thought about. I don't think it was purposely omitted. I just don't think it was thought about, to enshrine some of those very principles about what the legislation is meant to do in regard to being an opportunity for the voice of children to be reflected in everything we do when we're dealing with their needs. So if that is considered an appropriate amendment as we go through the committee process, if we do decide that it would be nice to have some kind of preamble in place, then I would hope that preamble would also take the time to acknowledge our position in Canada and, I would expect, in Ontario as well in terms of a provincial commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some 48 sections in part 2 of that document really do outline quite progressive perspectives on children, how we interact with children and how we ensure their rights.

1850

Some of the issues that I mentioned yesterday I'm going to mention again. One, very briefly, is the whole idea of the independence of the office. I know that the legislation very clearly in section 3 indicates that the advocate will be an officer of this assembly. What that means, what that has meant traditionally or in the mores

or the history or the legislative practice around here is that by definition that kind of situation infers that the process of identifying the child advocate will come from a committee of members of this House made up of one member from each party, and that that decision is more or less made on a consensus basis. It seems to me that that has been the practice for the last couple of appointments, the last several appointments. Certainly, the Premier is on record indicating that's exactly what's going to happen with this office. Again, the word, the nomenclature, the description of an independent officer of the Legislature would infer that, would suggest that that's the way things would be, but unfortunately, there's nothing actually in the bill that directly commits to that being the process.

I'm just wondering if it's not time that we enshrine that kind of process in terms of the legislation. I don't know whether that's a good thing or not, but I don't think it should be discounted. I think we should keep our options open, and I say, why not? What is the harm? Wouldn't it be appropriate if we do have an officer of the assembly enshrined in legislation as someone who is appointed in a particular way? It's time to cut the mustard and say that it's not a code word for "this is how we do it" but this is actually how we do it. We put it in the legislation and we say we're committed to this process, because what it really does is ensure that the child advocate has the confidence of all members of this Legislature. That's certainly what we're aiming for with our independent officers. So it's not good enough anymore to nudge, nudge, wink, wink, say no more; we know by saying "independent officer," we're really going to do it this way.

I think, notwithstanding my poor attempts at Monty Python's Terry Gilliam kind of humour—

Interjection.

Ms. Horwath: Okay. I do really think, though, that we need to take a look and see whether it's time that we start enshrining this activity right in the legislation. What better bill would there be to do this? What better opportunity is there, if it's not the office of the child advocate? It's a rare thing. It's not something that gets done every day, there's no doubt, so if we start enshrining it in the legislation, I think this would be a very fitting place to begin.

I'm going to go on to talk about some of the other issues that are important and that I think need to be addressed in the process of going through second reading debate, but particularly going through the committee stage. I mentioned already the whole issue of First Nations children. I don't want to go over the stats of overrepresentation; I know I've already mentioned it. But we really don't need to be reminded of the dismal failure of the McGuinty Liberals to live up to their words on First Nations issues in Bill 210.

I also think it's appropriate that we acknowledge the obligation that we have: If we're truly respecting the dignity of First Nations communities and if we're truly committed to the relationship that we have with them and

their right to determine the best ways of dealing with the issues of their own community, then I would say a place to make that happen is when we deal with legislation that we know is going to have a significant impact on the children of their community.

I think that it's important for us to acknowledge that it's not a matter of simply tacking on a clause or two or adding a piece to a bill. It entails the requirement of having a serious dialogue with the leaders of those communities, and the only way that can happen is through a concerted effort. So I would hope that we would look very carefully at the opportunity to perhaps take this bill up to the north and have the children, the families and the service providers of those communities come to the table and talk to us about what their needs are, considering that their children, again, are very much represented in the numbers of children who are engaged in the child welfare system.

I raise that because I know there's an anxiety to have an independent child advocate. I've certainly been pushing for that to a great extent in this Legislature, but let's not hurry it up so much that, once again, we miss a huge piece of this obligation, if you will, or miss a huge piece of this puzzle, which is talking to the very people whose children are the most affected in regard to the work that we do around child welfare.

I guess the issue from my perspective is, the timelines are tight, yes, but if we make that effort and if we take the bill and travel it up to the north—I don't know why we can't do that. I think if we're committed to doing that and committed to getting serious after doing that, to have the bill completed, we do have time to get it done. I think people here are committed to having an independent child advocate. I don't think there's anybody who says they're not committed to it but, holy smokes, let's get it right. Let's do it properly and make sure we're not offending First Nations communities yet again by not taking the time that we need to make sure their needs are being met. I urge even the backbencher Liberals who are here today, don't ask me why we should; ask your minister why we shouldn't, because I really do think we should. I think as individuals we understand that there is an obligation and we need to undertake it.

I'm kind of shocked that we haven't had that dialogue with the First Nations communities yet in regard to this bill. Hopefully it's going to happen. I certainly am putting my dibs in, asking that that be done, even if it means we have to travel during our May constituency week. I think if we make a concerted effort to do that and come back here and get the bill through third reading, everybody would feel that they've done the right thing by the First Nations communities.

The First Nations communities of course is one group that is significantly absent from the bill. But it's interesting because if you look at the bill, there are other client groups that are excluded. It's interesting because when the minister talks about the bill, she kind of characterizes it as simply taking what is now part of a ministry, a function of a ministry, removing that out and calling it

now an independent office, pretty much everything transferring over and now it's just independent, which is a good thing and which we all support, once again.

But the issue becomes that, unfortunately, in the transferring over, what we see is there are a couple of groups of children, if you will, that are not included in the new legislation, so I'm going to list them really quickly: students in schools for the deaf, schools for the blind and demonstration schools, young people held in police or court holding cells, young people receiving non-custodial services under the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Again, these are some of the people who are excluded from the legislation in particular.

I know the minister and others are saying there are memorandums that cover these people or there are other ways that we're going to include those kids, but that's not our reading of the bill. Of course, at committee we will have some time to discuss it in greater detail, and I look forward to it being amended if in fact it is the case, as we've seen, that it's not excluded in the legislation. I don't believe it's something that we need to simply leave to regulations. I think if we agree that those pieces should be a part of this child advocate responsibility, then there is no problem with putting into it the legislation.

There are a number of other issues that I hope are going to get fleshed out as we go through the committee process. I look forward to working with stakeholders coming to committee and talking about some of those issues. But it's interesting because, as I've already done a little bit of that myself—and I've relied somewhat on some work that's been done by an excellent organization here in the province of Ontario. I see one of the people from that group sitting in our gallery once again, Matthew Geigen-Miller. He has already written a report reviewing the bill and indicating some of the issues that he has identified. Some of those I'll be raising tonight and I'll be adding other ones as well.

1900

It was interesting, because I had also met with our advocate, and both Matthew and the advocate—Matthew is from an organization called Defence for Children International-Canada. One of the things that he's identified and one of the things that the advocate has identified—it was interesting, because I spoke to her about this whole idea of the powers that an advocate should and shouldn't have, and should the advocate have the power to investigate. So thereby, theoretically, investigation infers a number of other things: the power to call witnesses, to subpoena documents or to do these semi-legal kinds of activities—and correctly so. The advocate was very concerned that by being considered an investigator, the suggestion there is that an investigator is an unbiased person, that an unbiased person does the investigations. But just by nature of the advocate being an advocate, that means they're not unbiased. In fact, they're purposely biased in favour of the position of the child and what's right for the child. I understand that completely, and I think, in fact, that the advocate is right

in being careful about not being considered an investigator.

But the problem that I'm concerned about is that if we're only not allowing the advocate certain tools because of this boogeyman word called "investigation," then I think we're maybe missing the mark in terms of ensuring that the advocate has the kinds of tools that she or he needs to have when the next advocate is appointed. So I'm a little bit concerned about exactly what we're going to do with that issue, and I'm going to kind of suggest that perhaps we use a different word. If we don't want to call it an investigation, let's call it a review. Let's call it research. Let's call it anything but investigation. But the bottom line is, the advocate really does need to have the tools necessary to compel people to talk to him or her about the issues raised by the child that she's advocating for or the group of children that she's advocating for. It's extremely unfortunate that this legalese has gotten in the way of us making sure that we give the right tools to the advocate to do what the advocate needs to do. It's problematic that that's not in there, and I really hope that we find a way to make sure—hopefully this could happen through committee—that we have an opportunity to change that so that we get the tools that the advocate needs. It's an interesting conundrum, if you want to call it that, but it's certainly one we need to review.

Speaking of that, there's another kind of issue that is of concern as well. Again, it's around the language and it's around how these things are dealt with in the bill. It's the issue of the extent to which a child is actually given the appropriate opportunity to contact the advocate. Certainly they have the right to contact the advocate, but where does it outline in the legislation the obligation of agencies or institutions or organizations to ensure that the tools to actually contact the advocate are made available to the child? It's fine to say that they have the right to or they have to be given the opportunity to—I'm not sure exactly what the language is; I don't have it in front of me at this point in time in terms of being highlighted with sticky notes. But the bottom line is, there's nothing in there that says that the child has to be provided with the opportunity to make that call, the phone number, and the phone to make the call with.

Again, maybe it's a small oversight, maybe it's something that really wasn't considered because it was too specific. I don't know what the reason was and I'm expecting that we'll get into some more of that discussion hopefully at the committee level. But I really think it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we're not only talking the talk around the advocate and around children having access to the advocate, and then, lo and behold, when you look at the details of the bill, the mechanisms simply are not there. The tools are not there. So whether it's the tools of getting witnesses to review the issues, whether it's getting access to documentation by the advocate, or whether it's the child themselves having an opportunity to use a telephone to actually contact the advocate, these are things that are missing from the bill

and that need to be addressed significantly if the law, once it comes into force, is actually going to work for the children of Ontario.

I don't understand why the government has decided, in the way that the bill is written, to actually hamstring the advocate by not having taken care of this information or these details already. You know, the cynical side of me would say that the dreadful record of late—or maybe it's not just the record of late; it's the entire time that the government has been in office. But they have a really dreadful record when it comes to reports that are tabled in the Legislature by other independent officers. So I'm really concerned that they are in some ways hamstringing this particular independent officer because of the stinging rebukes, and—I have to say it—stinging rebukes against this very ministry and minister around problems. If you'll recall, the most recent one was the auditor's report on the children's aid societies, and the one prior to that was the report from the Ombudsman, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. I have to tell you, if this is the kind of manipulation of legislation that might happen to prevent these kinds of issues from coming forward, I would worry that that's the wrong motivation for not putting these really important tools and important opportunities in the bill itself to make sure that it functions in the way that we need it to function, not for us as lawmakers, not for us as politicians, but for the children of the province of Ontario, which really is the point of the legislation.

So I look forward to seeing some tightening up in some of those areas. I think, in the process of taking this through the committee, we can actually tighten some of that up and we can come out at the end of the process with a bill that is serving the right master, which would be the children of Ontario, as opposed to anybody else and their motivations, which I certainly am not going to say anything else about, except that I would hope that's not what this is all about.

Having said that, we do know that there are other interesting issues that we need to deal with in this bill. Another one that is kind of—you know, it's interesting. It's similar; not the same, but similar. At least I started thinking of it in a similar fashion when I was preparing my remarks for this evening. That's the whole way that the bill deals with the reports that are going to be provided by the advocate. What I noticed in the legislation is that the way the legislation is written, the advocate can provide reports to the Legislature annually, the same way that other independent officers do, and then other reports throughout the year to the public overall. The bill enshrines in that section a period of time after which the final report is completed but before it goes to the Speaker; the bill allows for 30 days for the ministry named in the report to get it first.

Now, I know, and everybody knows—in fact, we went all around this whole issue several times when we were dealing with the auditor's report. It became very clear then—so if anybody didn't know it then, everybody knows it now—that the process of the final report being created is just that: It's a process. It's not like the inde-

pendent officer of the Legislature, whether it be the Ombudsman or the auditor or the child advocate, does an investigation, an examination, a review—whatever we want to call it—and sits in isolation, writes up a report and then hands it over. We know very well and we've learned in quite vigorous detail the back and forth, the extent to which the back and forth takes place between the drafter of the report—this independent officer, whichever it may be—and the ministry that is being, let's say, reported upon, or that's the highlight of the report.

I just found it extremely interesting that the bill enshrines this 30-day period. Now, I don't have a problem with—you know, the back and forth happens. Eventually, the final report has to be drafted. Three or four days of a heads-up, even a week of a heads-up to the minister responsible or the ministry that the final report is going to be tabled in the Legislature or tabled with the Speaker—no problem; I get that. But 30 days? Why do you need 30 days?

1910

Then I started to think—and that's just my old cynical self coming out—“Gee, if I think about it, the time it took between perhaps the auditor's report actually coming out fully”—it just so happened that the minister took that time between the leak and when it came out fully to, lo and behold, table this very bill, Bill 165. So I'm thinking, “Gee, if there's a report that comes out and the minister gets 30 days' advance notice from anybody else in the Legislature, perhaps this is a way”—maybe we'll call it the spin cycle. It's the 30-day spin cycle, where the government can then spin the response on the report.

There is really no need for a 30-day time frame. I really think it's excessive. But again, when it comes to the committee process, we're going to talk about what the justification for that might be or why the 30 days was put in the bill. I'm saying that was the cynical side of myself, and you know what? Once in a while I do get a cynical side.

Interestingly enough, when we're talking about timelines, the other thing that's glaringly missing from this bill but exists in, for example, the Ombudsman Act, is the obligation of the ministry that is subject to the report to respond in any way. There's no obligation for a response. Not only is there no obligation for a response—this report has various recommendations or various issues or concerns identified that are problematic, but nowhere does it say that, once that report has been tabled, there's any obligation for whatever ministry is involved to do anything about it. Not only do they not have to do anything about it, they don't have to do anything about it in any time frame whatsoever.

So I really do believe that there are pieces to this bill that have not been done in as tight a way as I would have liked to see. I really do expect that we're going to have a significant discussion and debate at the committee. I don't think any of these things is unfixable. I don't think any of these things is necessarily a stopper in terms of not being able to be fixed and put into the bill. I don't think they're anything that causes any great problem to

actually have them addressed. It's a matter of drafting the language that would address them. There's perhaps some reason why or, I don't know, some kind of past practice that prevents, for example, the minister or the ministry or whoever the bill drafter is from wanting to put a preamble in. Something like that, although I'd prefer it, if it's not in there is not going to be the end of the world. But I do think that there are real nitty-gritty pieces of this legislation that need to be improved upon.

I think that there are things we can do to actually make the bill better. I look forward to the committee process; myself and the critic from the Conservative caucus will be there. I'm sure people will recall, if they were watching yesterday, that she in fact brought a number of issues forward and made her commitment as well to work on the bill. I know that Matthew and many other stakeholders will be there when we're in committee at public hearings, and hopefully when we're in the north at public hearings as well, talking to some of those First Nations communities. I've outlined a number of them; there are others that I haven't, and I know that they will be coming forward at that time.

For example, there's an entire issue around the privacy piece that's in here and the extent to which it's perhaps problematic to take the language from the Personal Health Information Protection Act and apply it to the child advocate regime. It's around things like when a substitute decision has to be made, you need a substitute decision-maker. In the context of health that's pretty straightforward: If someone is in an accident, they can't decide on the treatment, and a parent or guardian steps in. But in the context of an advocate's position—this is just an example—the child can't necessarily be in a position to make a decision on their own and so a substitute decision-maker is required. Who is the substitute decision-maker in the case where the child is a ward of the crown? Well, gee, that substitute decision-maker could in fact be the CAS. It could be very well the children's aid society that the child is having some difficulty with. So it doesn't really make sense, then, to have the children's aid society make the decision as to whether or not, for example, an advocate should be working on behalf of the child or dealing with the situation. I don't think it's necessarily something that prevents us from moving forward, but it's something that we do need to iron out at the committee stage, and I look forward to that.

I'm almost out of time. I do want to just say that I very much support the independence of the child advocate, but I am also very committed to making sure that we get that independent office to be the best it possibly can be, and be the strongest and most independent voice for children, on behalf of children and with children in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the remarks that were made by the member for Hamilton East.

When we were coming into government and creating our platform, we committed to a number of things. We

promised to bring forward a law that would have an independent child and youth advocate report to the Legislative Assembly. We said the appointment would take place through an all-party legislative committee, and we said we would make the advocate as independent as the Auditor General and the Ombudsman. In fact, this legislation meets all three of those commitments. We are doing exactly what we said we would do.

It's quite significant that we are making the child advocate independent of the government and reporting to the Legislature, because that means that the child advocate cannot be muzzled by any government. Unfortunately, there has been a history in this province on occasion of attempts to muzzle the child advocate when she has attempted to say, "This particular service is not working correctly. We need to pay attention to these children with this problem and correct it." We are determined that that is not going to happen again, and this legislation will deliver on the independence.

The member for Hamilton East raised the issue of investigative powers. I think it's very important that we sort out the difference between investigation and advocacy. In this case, the office of the child lawyer and the Ombudsman already have investigative powers. It is not necessary for the advocate to have investigative powers, because other people who report to the Legislature already have those investigative powers. The important role of the advocate is to speak on behalf of the children who cannot.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): I want to congratulate my colleague from Hamilton East, who I know has worked very hard with many of the stakeholders—

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Your mike is off. We can't hear you.

Ms. MacLeod: You can't hear me? Okay, thanks. We have to have some humour in this place from time to time.

In any event, I want to congratulate my colleague from Hamilton East, who I know has been working with some of the stakeholders who are here with us this evening. She, along with myself, brings a commitment to work with the minister for this. I want to congratulate the minister. I know that she undertook a consultation today with some of the key stakeholders across the province and I do hope that she will include myself and Ms. Horwath as we move forward in the upcoming days and weeks ahead with this legislation.

Tonight we're going to have a lot of different members talk about their views on this particular piece of legislation before us, which I think is going to be very healthy to improve it and make sure that we get this legislation right. Of course, we all do have a few concerns. Mine was a lack of consultation, and I understand the minister is undertaking to improve that. As Ms. Horwath said, entry to the children's residential centres, as well as access by the children to the advocate is important. Two groups have been excluded in this piece of

legislation, and we're hoping they will be re-entered. We'd like to see it given a little bit of teeth.

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On that, I want to congratulate again my colleague from Hamilton East for doing a great job yesterday and today in articulating her views, and I'm making the commitment again that I will work with the minister to make sure that this bill is done properly. We will consult on it, we will study and we will participate.

Mr. Marchese: I want to congratulate the member from Hamilton East on her speech. She made a lot of points, including giving us a brief history of what the government hasn't done in the last three and a half years. They promised in 2003 that they would have an independent child advocate and then it took three years for my friend and colleague to press them to introduce legislation that would in fact do what they had promised.

In February 2006, she introduced an amendment to Bill 210 that would have made the child advocate independent, and the Liberals voted against that. She did, on April 6, 2006, introduce her own Bill 97 to make the child advocate independent, and we had no support from the government in that regard.

It takes a long while to push government, it seems, to do the right thing. To listen to the member from Guelph, it appears as if this government has been advocating for this and has been doing this for a long time, but it took, Minister, three and a half years to push you to do this. Why does it take three and a half years to do something as simple as making the child advocate independent of government? Why does it take that long?

Even when prompted to do the right thing and we give them the right opportunities to do so, they reject them. We are rebuffed by them. Then they say, "No, we haven't. No, we've got a bill. It's been here all along. It's been planned and talked about for years and years." God bless. At this pace, so many children have been lost to their own devices without any support—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Oh, the advocate has always been there. Okay. No, it's true, the advocate has been there. It's true. We were looking for an independent advocate for a long time and now we're here to debate that. I'll add to the points she's already made.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I'm pleased to have just a couple of minutes. It's encouraging to hear that we have all three parties in agreement that we want to move forward on this legislation. I heard the member from Hamilton East in her earlier comments talking about the 11th hour with legislation, bringing it forward. It's been a very full agenda over the past three and a half years.

I suppose any given party could decide it's time to take your foot off the gas, coast along and not introduce new legislation, but we're committed to ensuring that we have a very full schedule. As a matter of fact, that schedule is so full, this is our second day back from our winter break and this is the second day that this has been debated—two days, twice debated. Interestingly enough,

on the second day, it's being debated in the evening. Now I don't know—maybe our whip knows or our House leader could probably tell us—the number of times we voted for night sittings so that we could have a very full agenda, get as much legislation addressed in this place as possible, have the broadest scope of debate. I'd be interested in how many times the third party has voted to work the evenings so we could have these debates. Zero? Zero.

The point being, we're all committed to this legislation. We may have some different takes on it. We're all committed to seeing it done. We've had a very full legislative agenda, and to achieve all of that, we've all agreed that you have to go beyond the norm of daytime sittings and put in evenings. In some cases early on, we sat till midnight to try to accomplish in those early goings as much as we possibly could as a Legislature.

As to the legislation itself, I'm particularly pleased at the structure of it. I think it's important to have an independent officer of the Legislature and that that officer reports to the Legislature. I can't think of how more independent and democratic that can be than to have this body, the one able to manage, to get the information directly and be able to provide direction to the advocate as to how to proceed if there's further action required.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Hamilton East, if she chooses to reply for two minutes.

Ms. Horwath: I appreciate the comments from all of the members in the Legislature. I'm not sure if any of the members here are going to end up at whatever committee this bill is actually referred to, but if some of the members who were here today are on that committee, I hope they will take seriously some of the comments that have been made. Notwithstanding some of the cynical ways those comments have been made, the bottom line is there are serious flaws to this bill that need to be addressed. We have an obligation, each and every one of us, to make sure they are addressed, and I look forward to making sure that when we get to committee, all of these issues are fleshed out, because it's extremely important that we get this right.

Children are extremely vulnerable, and we know that. I'm not going to mention any specific horror stories, because it's not appropriate to do so. What we need to do, though, is make sure that we have a child advocate in this province who has all of the tools, all of the ability, all of the accountability required to make the changes that need to be made so that the children of this province are treated appropriately, wherever they are.

I have to say that notwithstanding some of the suggestions that the comments I raised were not accurate, in fact I did sit in a briefing with the staff of the ministry and asked very clearly about issues like which children were currently being served who will be excluded from the legislation. They concurred with me that they're not in the legislation. "We'll deal with it by regulation. It's an the informal relationship. We're going to keep it that

way.” No matter what the minister says, we can put that in the legislation and we should.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a pleasure for me to have a few moments this evening to make some comments on Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth in Ontario.

I had an opportunity to spend a three-year term—my last term on council in the city of Peterborough and prior to my election in 2003—and to sit on the board of the Kawartha-Haliburton Children's Aid Society. It was my first opportunity to sit on a children's aid society. Certainly over the years I was very familiar with their function and their work with children in very difficult situations, but it was my first opportunity to actually sit on the board. One of those things I concluded from that experience was the need to establish an independent children's advocate in Ontario.

I commend the minister. We've had a very full legislative agenda over the last three-plus years and an opportunity finally for the Minister of Children and Youth Services—I know her passion, her great advocacy in this area—to introduce this bill for first reading last November, and now, with the House resuming this last Monday, to carry on in second reading of this particular bill.

It's interesting, if I can digress for a moment. I certainly remember the Bob Rae government, and it's my recollection that they didn't even meet in the House from 1994 to 1995. They didn't bother meeting in the House at all. My good friend the member from Trinity-Spadina was one of the very influential members of that Rae cabinet. I remember him travelling throughout Ontario, talking about this and that, all the wonderful accomplishments, but they didn't meet. They talk about bringing in a bill late in the agenda. Well, for the last year, they didn't even have the courage to meet in this Legislature to move ahead on their agenda. I don't know what happened to the member from Trinity-Spadina and his very influential role. They must have muzzled him for that last year, and he wasn't doing very much.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: Somebody was just heckling about the Peterborough Petes. We didn't have a very good season this year. We didn't make the playoffs for the first time in 20, 25 years, but we'll be back next time. We've always found the Barrie Colts historically very easy opponents. So I can tell my friend from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford—did I get it right?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): Yes.

Mr. Leal: —that I know the Colts will be in the playoffs this year, but I'm not sure that they're going to have a very long spring. They'll be getting their golf clubs out rather soon.

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If I could get back to Bill 165 here for a moment, it's never too late to do the right thing and I commend the minister for bringing this forward. In fact, we have a very

long and distinguished history here in Ontario of selecting people as officers of the Legislature. One of the very first people was the late Arthur Maloney, who was the first Ombudsman, I believe, in the province. So this Legislature has a very strong record of three parties coming together and selecting officers in various areas who perform their functions extremely well. I look at the person who will be selected as the first advocate here in this role as an independent officer of this Legislature to be an exemplary person with the qualities needed to carry out this job.

I know the good folks in Peterborough are tuning in tonight. It's a little after 7:30.

Mr. Marchese: What channel?

Mr. Leal: They're tuning in to the parliamentary station. We have Cogeco in Peterborough, not Rogers, so it's channel 71. I know they're watching this evening.

Look for a moment at section 13, the functions and powers of this position.

“The functions of the advocate are to,

“(a) provide advocacy to children and youth who are seeking or receiving approved services under the Child and Family Services Act;

“(b) provide advocacy to young persons who are being dealt with under the Ministry of Correctional Services Act;

“(c) promote the rights under part V of the Child and Family Services Act of children in care and the rights under part V of the Ministry of Correctional Services Act of young persons in custody; and

“(d) provide any other advocacy that is permitted under the regulations or any other act.”

In carrying out the functions of this advocacy, they are to:

“(a) receive and respond to complaints;

“(b) conduct reviews, whether in response to a complaint or on the advocate's own initiative;

“(c) represent the views and preferences of children and youth to agencies and to service providers;

“(d) use informal methods to resolve disputes between children or youth and agencies and service providers;

“(e) make reports as to the result of the advocate's review to the complainant, subject to” other parts of the act;

“(f) provide advice and make recommendations to entities including governments, ministers, agencies and service providers responsible for services” provided to youth and children in Ontario.

I think the minister has provided an excellent framework to start discussions for this position to be established as an officer of this Legislature. This is a bill where there is a real opportunity for the three parties to come together to have an amended piece of legislation, because it will probably go to the committee, to make it a very strong piece of legislation. It seems to me that when it comes to being an advocate for children and youth in Ontario, this is not a particularly partisan issue, and it's one that we can come together on for the best interests of children and youth in Ontario.

I just want to digress for a moment. It was our government that certainly provided the additional powers to the auditor here in Ontario to finally look at children's aid societies. That was a very important and fundamental step to take. When you provide those powers to the Auditor General, you certainly lift the veil and often, when you lift the veil, some circumstances that have occurred are identified by the Auditor General. This minister, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, has taken the appropriate action to address those concerns identified by the Auditor General. As I said, it was the first time the Auditor General actually had the power to look at children's aid societies in Ontario and, to be fair, it was a very small number of societies that had some difficulties, and the minister took very quick and decisive action to make those corrections. I commend her for doing so.

I think also, if passed, this legislation will eliminate the possibility of government interference or influence over the work of the advocate's office. It's very important to maintain that independence and transparency.

I'd like to take the opportunity to quote on making the advocate independent from a gentleman by the name of Les Horne, who was Ontario's first provincial child advocate and is currently executive director of Defence for Children International-Canada. He said, "It is very gratifying that the government has moved ahead with a plan to establish a child advocate as a strong and effective protective force for the most vulnerable children in this province. This is a major step forward for Ontario."

The current advocate represents children and youth who are seeking or receiving approved services under the Child and Family Services Act as well as those who are in the youth justice system, the children's mental health system, the child welfare system, and provincial and demonstration schools for the deaf and the blind. An independent advocate would also represent children and youth in all these categories.

The advocate's office currently receives about 3,000 calls every year. The main issues that the advocate deals with are: standards of practice for children in residential care, that is, rules and policies; peer-on-peer violence; adequate resources for special needs children living at home; and aboriginal child welfare.

I know as this bill moves forward, the minister will be engaging, certainly, the First Nations communities across the province of Ontario with regard to this particular office. I know I will have the opportunity in the not-too-distant future to chat with the two First Nations communities that are in my riding of Peterborough, Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations. I know they will be very interested in providing their thoughts and views on this particular piece of legislation, Bill 165.

The advocate's office empowers young people and families to make complaints about unacceptable treatment and helps them to navigate and negotiate through what can be at times a very complex system.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: I hear again from my friend from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford talking about the Peterborough Petes, but we can have that debate at another opportunity.

Before preparing the legislation, the government had hired a number of independent consultants to conduct extensive consultations with individuals, including the current advocate, with organizations that work on behalf of vulnerable children and youth in the province. This government also commissioned a review to look at how best to go about achieving a strong, independent child advocate who can speak out on behalf of children and youth in this wonderful province.

The review of this process made a number of key recommendations, almost all of which have been incorporated in Bill 165. These recommendations include: making the advocate an independent officer of the Legislature; as a main part of the mandate, acting as a strong voice for children and youth, consistent with the functions and activities of the current office, including responding to complaints, conducting reviews, making recommendations, and engaging in informal dispute resolutions; and requiring the advocate to make an annual report to the Ontario Legislature, which I think will be most important, and to provide that review of what has gone on after this office has been established.

An independent advocate would also have the flexibility to present special reports to the Legislature at his or her own discretion. The report also recommended that the advocate not engage in formal advocacy in courts or before tribunals or carry investigative or adjudicative functions.

Our government, through this legislation, has accepted these recommendations. There has never been a better opportunity to demonstrate our support for Ontario's most vulnerable children and youth.

Besides the introduction of legislation up for second reading debate, our government has done much to improve the lives of Ontario's young people, particularly those at risk. Last fall, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act was proclaimed, and the amendments are now in effect. Our government has invested more than \$1.2 billion this year to protect children and youth at risk so they have the best possible chance for success.

We're dedicated to doing a better job of protecting and advocating on behalf of children and youth, particularly those most vulnerable in our province. By making the provincial child and youth advocate independent, we're taking another great stride towards achieving that very important goal. Strengthening the advocate's role in this way means we will be giving a strong voice, free from political interference, to the children and youth who need it most.

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We encourage all members of this Legislature to support second reading of this legislation. I think it's the right thing for all parties to do and I can see a real opportunity for all of us to come together on this particular piece of legislation.

I'd share with you some of my experience of sitting for three years on a children's aid society. From time to time, we would hear presentations come forward about the need for the Ontario Legislature to establish an independent officer to be an advocate. I happen to think this bill goes a very long way to achieve that very important goal.

Children are our most precious resource and we have done a number of things since we've had the great privilege of being a government, like reducing class sizes, a very important thing to do and something that was clearly identified by the Dr. Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain report, that opportunity to identify kids in smaller class sizes to give them a leg up. I think that's part and parcel of our whole approach to governing: investing in capping class sizes in the lower grades to have the opportunity to identify children that have some specific needs so that we can channel the appropriate resources into those areas, being very strong. This bill, along with Bill 210, creating the independent officer as an advocate for children in this province, goes a long way to meeting our campaign commitments that we made in the fall of 2003 to really put resources in place to assist our children. It's been an important thing for us to do, and something that many people in Ontario have recognized as providing those resources and those areas to assist our children.

It's not a bill that has a great many pages to it, but when you take the time to read this bill, you know it's a bill that contains a significant amount of content. I just want to touch upon the reporting requirements:

"The independent officer," this child advocate, "shall after April 30 in every year, make a report in writing and shall deliver the report to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly no later than December 31 in that year.... The report mentioned in subsection (1), shall contain whatever information the advocate considers appropriate, but shall contain, at a minimum, a report on the activities and finances of the advocate's office, the outcomes expected in the fiscal year of the government of Ontario in which the report is made, and the results achieved in the previous fiscal year." Again, accountability and transparency that are not only required of our ministers and ministries, but certainly officers of this Legislative Assembly.

"The advocate shall deliver a copy ... to the minister of any ministry to which it is relevant at least 30 days before delivering it to the Speaker." I think that's a very reasonable thing to do, to provide an opportunity for the minister or ministry 30 days before it's delivered to the Speaker to potentially look at some of the things that are being identified in this report, an opportunity for minister and ministry to start the ball rolling, to take perhaps whatever corrective action needs to be done in that area.

It also says, "The advocate may make any other public reports as he or she considers appropriate, and may present such a report to the public or any other person he or she considers appropriate, but shall deliver a copy of the report to the minister of any ministry to which it is relevant at least 30 days before the presentation."

I look forward too to the next little while. I know that in my riding of Peterborough a number of groups have come forward and have been pressing for a children's advocate to be an officer of the Legislature, to be established. It will give me an opportunity to meet with them, an opportunity to discuss with them and to bring some of their thoughts and ideas forward, as I suspect that this piece of legislation will be going to committee, an opportunity to review some of the issues and an opportunity perhaps to make a good piece of legislation even better.

I look back and I think we've probably now completed about 200 of our 213 campaign commitments, and the establishment of the child advocate was certainly part of that. The people of Ontario will be pleased when this act gets final approval and fulfills another one of our campaign commitments.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: I've got the Leader of the Opposition listening to that point. I'm glad he's taking the opportunity to listen tonight; I got his attention on that one.

If I could perhaps wind up here, this is a very sound piece of legislation. I think it's timely. As I said, it's never too late to do the right thing. I commend the minister for bringing it forward. It will provide significant advocacy for children in the province of Ontario and I look forward to it going to committee, an opportunity to hear presentations and to make what I believe to be a good piece of legislation even better through the legislative process. As I said, I look forward to consulting people of my own riding on Bill 165. Again, I salute the minister's leadership in bringing this forward.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I wasn't planning to join this debate, but I'm sure the member is misinformed, because the member for Peterborough just spoke and I believe I correctly heard him say that this ragtag bunch across the way has now kept 200 of their 213 campaign promises. I wanted to correct the record because I think he actually has that backwards: It's 200 of their 213 campaign promises they haven't kept.

This is an administration led by a Premier, Dalton McGuinty, who has the world record for not keeping campaign promises, starting with the failure to keep his promise not to raise taxes. Of course, we all know what that was all about. But even in this case, where I will say that this was something they said they would do, now we're seeing a flurry of activity at the end. It is truly a deathbed repentance by an organization that realizes they have been found out by the voters of Ontario. When they opened the door to the Auditor General—when the Premier has said, "Please get up and commend us for doing what we said we would do once in a while," I've said, "Yes, it's good that the Auditor General is in there, but it's only after being exposed by the Auditor General for scandalous mismanagement, scandalous waste of taxpayers' money, scandalous disregard for any kind of a process that anyone could respect." Then we saw this

piece of legislation brought forward to keep that campaign promise. So finally, here we are at the 11th hour, the last minute of the term of this government, and this piece of legislation is brought forward.

I would hope my friend from Peterborough would want to stand in his place and correct the record, because I know he wouldn't want the record to show that he actually thought, believed or articulated the fact that these people have kept more than about two of their campaign promises. I am sure he wouldn't want it to be said that they were keeping any of them in a timely fashion rather than being dragged, kicking and screaming, to keep the promises at the last possible minute when the House is about to finish for an election.

Mr. Marchese: The member from Peterborough makes some good points. He says, "It is never too late to introduce some good measures," and he's right. However, people become a little bit cynical when they're presented just before an election. You would understand that, because if you were on these benches, you would say the same thing—and you did and you will when you become opposition as well. That's the problem around this place. Once you're in government, you say, "Well, it's never too late," and if you're in opposition, you say, "We've been pushing you for three years. God bless, finally before an election."

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I wonder whether the member from Peterborough—because he seems so knowledgeable on these matters—can respond to the question I have, though. I was reading the bill, and on page 6, subsection 15(2)—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Page 7, top of the page, it says:

"Consultation

"(2) The advocate shall consult with the minister or administrative head after carrying out the systemic review and before forming a final opinion on the subject matter of the review."

Now, it seems to me that if an officer is independent, they shouldn't have to have it as an obligation in the bill to "consult with the minister after doing the systemic review and before forming a final opinion on the subject matter of the review." If this is the case, how independent is the child advocate when he has to report to the minister before the final opinion of the systemic review is given? It seems odd to me, and it would seem to you to be odd as well. I would hope, given your careful review of the bill and given that the Ombudsman doesn't have to do that, the Environmental Commissioner doesn't have to do that, the Auditor General doesn't have to do that and the chief electoral officer doesn't have to do that. Something is wrong when this happens. Please comment.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): First of all, I think it truly is unfortunate when the member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey, who purports that he wants to bring some decorum to this place, looks across the way and calls us a "ragtag bunch" when we have introduced a bill

that supports the independent office of a children's advocate. This is a very, very serious issue.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind all of the honourable members in this House how it came to pass that the members on this side are committed to an independent office of the children's advocate. It goes back to when we were in opposition. On the watch of the previous government, there were eight children who died in the care of the province of Ontario and, yes, the office of the children's advocate was muzzled. The opposition of the day said that was unacceptable. The opposition of the day said that if we came to government, we would make the office of the child advocate independent and require that it would report to this Legislature. There were some very, very serious circumstances that brought this issue to the fore. It was reported on the front pages of the national media of the day.

I would say to the honourable members on the other side of the House who think that this is some political pandering, some political exercise in response to a recent Ombudsman report, nothing could be further from the truth. This government and this Premier have committed to protecting the interests of children for years, and that is what we are debating here this evening. I think it is important that we all bring a degree of seriousness to the debate that's under way because the children in our care deserve it.

Mr. Tascona: I'm going to deal with that. I'm going to be speaking in roughly less than two minutes, but in response to the Minister of Agriculture, when he was talking about a ragtag bunch, he was talking about the fact that it took them three and a half years to deal with an issue that they promised to deal with. That's all he was talking about.

I'm going to deal with the guts of the legislation in terms of what they're really trying to do. They're not really trying to do much in terms of what the structure is, because there was a child advocate set up under Bill Davis when he was Premier who reported directly to the minister. What the government is proposing to do—and it's taken them three and a half years to getting around to trying to do it, with some very tight controls over what is supposed to be an independent office of this Legislature—is that the officer is going to be reporting to this Legislature but the systemic review which my friend is referring to under section 15, which is defined in the legislation to be very clear on how they are going to limit what the office of the child advocate will be able to do and the controls in terms of sifting—in other words, controlling what kind of opinion and review is going to be done. Quite frankly, the controls throughout this particular bill—and when they call it advocacy, let's be honest: It's not advocacy. The advocate is not going to be allowed to go into a tribunal, is not going to be allowed to go into a court to really provide advocacy and protect the rights of a child. They are being restricted from going into any situation where a child is in a tribunal proceeding or a court proceeding—where the child would really need the benefit of an advocate. They're going to leave the child alone in that situation, which is not right.

I didn't want to comment about the Colts yet, but I will.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Peterborough has two minutes to reply if he wishes.

Mr. Leal: I did appreciate the comments from my colleagues the members from Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey, Trinity–Spadina, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and my very good friend the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford.

It's interesting. I listened very carefully to the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition. I can understand why he's having a bad day today. Because when you look at Christina Blizzard's comment from the Toronto Sun today, it said, "Flaherty's Bedroom May be Icy; Federal Tory Budget Helps Ontario Liberals More Than His MPP Wife's Conservatives." So when you read this analysis that's in the Toronto Sun, I can understand why the Leader of the Opposition is perhaps not having a good day today and is kind of agitated after he reads those kind of comments about the federal budget closing the fiscal gap here in Ontario—and the key reason it happened was the strong advocacy by Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Getting back to Bill 165, I do appreciate the comments as we move forward on this. As I said, I believe that advocacy for children in the province of Ontario is not a partisan issue. I look forward to the continuing of second reading debate in this House on this bill, an opportunity to take it to the committee. Coming together, there are some rare opportunities in the life of a particular Parliament, the 38th Parliament, but I think this bill is one of those opportunities when the three parties can come together to develop a bill to advocate on behalf of vulnerable children who need representation; they need advocacy. This bill will bring it about. And I do commit to my friend from Trinity–Spadina to look at that clause and get an interpretation.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tascona: I'm very pleased to join the debate on Bill 165.

I just want to comment to the member for Peterborough; he made those comments about the Barrie Colts. The fact of the matter is the Colts eliminated the Peterborough Petes 8-2 last week from their season—it was a miserable season—and the Colts will probably win the Memorial Cup this year. I just want to go on the record for that.

But this is a very serious bill. I think what's really interesting about this bill is the number of definitions that they've got to basically make sure that this independent officer of the Legislature, as they want to call it, knows exactly the limits of their powers. They didn't do it under the powers section, which is section 14; they made sure they did it under the definitions section.

One of the definitions that caught my eye in particular was the definition of "advocacy." You know, why would you go as far as to define what an advocate would be, when the act is entitled An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth? But they define it. Here's how they define it.

They say, "'advocacy' means promoting the views and preferences of children and youth as provided for in this act, and exercising the functions and powers outlined in sections 13 and 14, but does not include conducting investigations or providing legal advice or legal representation." Now, certainly this is not an advocate in the truest sense of the word. Because when you go into this a little bit further, you go into this systemic review, and they define what a systemic review is. It means "providing advocacy to a group of children or youth who are in similar circumstances, either in response to a complaint or request by one child or youth, or on the advocate's own initiative and includes the review of the facilities, systems, agencies, service providers and processes as permitted under this or any other act." And when they say "permitted," that means what the regulations will provide, because they're going to be very strict with respect to what this particular child advocate can get involved in.

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I guess that really goes to what the spirit and the purpose of this bill is. I know my colleague from Nepean–Carleton, who is the critic for this ministry, has been very clear in terms of what her concerns are: a lack of consultation with stakeholders and parliamentary colleagues. The bill has really no teeth. There are no investigative powers, no ability to summons witnesses, no ability to summons evidence and no ability to review child deaths. Another concern is that children's access to the advocate is not guaranteed and entrance to facilities by the advocate is restricted. The other concern is that although the scope and mandate of this office is broad, the bill still manages to leave out two groups that are presently protected by the current office of the chief children's advocate. Those two groups are young people held in police or court holding cells and young people transported to or from police or court holding cells while in custody, and students in schools for the deaf and schools for the blind and demonstration schools. These two groups depend on the child advocate in its current form.

It's important in terms of the debate that there are answers provided to the questions as to why certain children are excluded from protection now when they weren't before. It's also important to have the minister deal with the situation in terms of what is really the intent and purpose of this particular bill. Is it purposely set up to be an office of the Legislature so the minister can basically push off her responsibilities to someone else in a non-contentious way, because they're going to deal with the situation in a way that is going to be removed from the public eye in terms of this Legislature? Because the only time this is going to come back before this Legislature, these types of issues where children are complaining, is when the officer reports to the Legislature in their annual report. And we know what that's like when we get these reports. We have the office of the Ombudsman, we have the office of the Environment Commissioner, the privacy commissioner. They report

annually to the Legislature, and I guess for a couple of days there are questions and whatever in terms of what's going on. But the controls that are put on the office—everybody here believes in accountability and certainly there should be accountability in the expenses and how that office is operating. But it's very clear in this bill, under section 8, in terms of the controls that are put on their expenditures by the Board of Internal Economy, in terms of what they can do and the expenditures they are allowed to have. So obviously that plays into the independence of this particular officer, because the real meaning of independence is that they're going to be able to do their job and report on the mandate that they have, and they're not going to be restricted.

My friend from Trinity-Spadina pointed out and asked for my view in terms of subsection 15(1), which is entitled "Notice of review." It states, "Where the advocate intends to undertake a systemic review, the advocate shall advise the minister or the administrative head of the ministry, agency, service provider or other entity that is to be affected of the intention to conduct the review." And that's fair in terms of giving them notice that they'll be looking at that particular group.

Under "Consultation," which is subsection (2), "The advocate shall consult with the minister or administrative head after carrying out the systemic review and before forming a final opinion on the subject matter of the review." What that means is they're going to discuss things, and it's going to be discussed after carrying out the review but before they form a final opinion, obviously to give them an opportunity to respond to some findings. The problem with that is that's done behind closed doors. There should be some public scrutiny in terms of what is going on at that particular process, but there isn't.

What's more troubling is the obligation on others, and that's the obligation of service providers. My riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, which covers Barrie, Innisfil and Bradford, is a very high-growth area. Certainly the area, in terms of children services and other family services, is lacking in funding. It's underfunded by this government in terms of dealing with the growth that has come about in this area. So the underfunding that has come from this government in terms of the children's aid society, in terms of other organizations, is very dramatic because of their lack of responsiveness to the growth that comes into an area. When you have new growth in an area, you need to have those services that are going to help families and children. This is something that this government has not addressed with their old formulas and how they want to approach this type of issue in terms of child protection.

Section 16 deals with the obligations of service providers. It states, under subsection (1), "An agency or service provider, as the case may be, shall inform a child in care or a young person in custody, in language suitable to his or her understanding, of the existence and role of the advocate, and of how the advocate may be contacted." Under subsection (2), it says, "Every agency or service provider shall provide the advocate with rea-

sonable private access to a child in care or young person in custody who wishes to meet with the advocate."

What's missing in this bill—these are mandatory requirements of the service provider to inform the child about the child advocate and the means of contacting and a way for them to consult each other—what's lacking is consequences. What if they don't do that? Are we going to find out about that in an annual report, that this agency didn't do this? There have to be consequences for not allowing the protections.

The protections that they want to have in this bill are obviously to protect the child from the type of treatment that an agency may be providing them. Everybody knows about the type of review that went on with the children's aid societies and the Ombudsman's report, which wasn't exactly complimentary of that particular area, and knows that if this isn't done under section 16, even though there is a moral obligation and a spiritual obligation in terms of doing that and the language would support that in the Legislature, there are no consequences. They can say, "So what? This situation is too hot. We don't want to be labelled. We don't want to get into pressure. We don't want to get into trouble with the minister." So that is a very, very difficult situation for the child in terms of their not being able to ensure, and I think that's something that the government is going to have to respond to. The government is going to have to amend this bill in terms of making sure that the obligations on other sections are made not only mandatory but that there are consequences for not doing what they are supposed to do. Those consequences can only deal with the management of that particular organization, in terms of how they are conducting themselves, especially since they're funded by the taxpayer, they're funded by the province in terms of providing the service that they're supposed to provide to a child. So that's going to have to be amended in terms of making sure that there are consequences for not providing the consultation process with respect to the child advocate for the person who is requiring it.

There is very clearly stated in the bill, in terms of section 14, the powers: "In carrying out the functions of the advocate, the advocate may...." Now, that doesn't mean they have to do it. This is basically a discretionary power given to the child advocate to get into a number of areas. But the one area they can't get involved in—and it's very clear; the title is "Restriction on acting as counsel." In subsection 14(2), it says "The advocate shall not represent a child or youth before a court or tribunal." I've got to ask the government, why? Why did they put that in? Why would they go through all the process in terms of dealing with this particular situation, and it ends up in a tribunal, it ends up in a court? How does the minister think that the child advocate is not going to be dragged into a court proceeding? They are going to be brought into a court proceeding; they're going to be brought into a tribunal proceeding, especially if they have been involved in that child's situation. The minister's saying no, they can't act as an advocate in the truest sense of the word, in terms of appearing and representing

the child in a tribunal or a court, but they can be brought in and they will be brought in—you can guarantee it, Madam Minister—as a witness into that type of proceeding. Because the way you set out their powers, there is no reason why they wouldn't be. And if that's fine for the minister, that's great, but what is the purpose of that being the situation?

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You have to think it through in terms of why you would want the child advocate brought in as a witness in a proceeding before a tribunal or a court, especially when you have, under section 20, a limitation on liability. It's a kind of a strange limitation on liability, in terms of protecting an officer. It says, "No proceeding shall be commenced against the advocate or any person acting on behalf of or under the authority of the advocate for anything done, reported or said in good faith in the course of the exercise or performance or intended exercise or performance of a power, duty or function under this or any other act."

So obviously, if what they did was in bad faith, they're going to be brought before a court or a proceeding because of the way they have acted in terms of protecting that particular child. Quite frankly, I'm very surprised by the type of language you're using, and what you're trying to accomplish in terms of this situation. I don't know why you would be bringing in a liability limitation against this particular office in terms of what they're supposed to be doing is for the benefit of the public, and they're supposed to be acting in good faith at all times.

When you look at this situation, you wonder whether the government is really serious about this bill. The way it is drafted, one would question the seriousness of what they were trying to do here, because the bill, in terms of what a child advocate would do, is nowhere near what is going on in other jurisdictions. It's not near what's going on in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. I have to ask the minister, why did she choose the route that she chose as opposed to other jurisdictions that have some experience in this issue? Ontario is supposed to be the leader in all areas of this province and this country in terms of the things that they get involved in. So I don't know why we would be lagging other jurisdictions in an area such as child and family services.

But she'll have to answer to that when this goes to public hearings, if it gets to public hearings. So one has to look at this in terms of whether the bill is going to die on the order paper, or be rushed without adequate consultation and the right bill will not pass. In terms of the number of pages, this is a very, very small bill. There are only 11 pages to this bill. And it is a very simply drafted bill in terms of making sure that the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth—it is very clear that the controls over how they're going to operate rest with the Board of Internal Economy, which is run by the government, we might add, because they have the control over the Board of Internal Economy.

The other part of it is that when the advocate goes to do a review, their review is going to be subject to

consultation by the minister or the head of the agency that they're looking at, after they do the review and before they form a final opinion. I would have thought that you would talk to the minister or that agency before you started the review and made sure that you got the right information and knew what you were doing in terms of where you wanted to go with that particular review. Then, after you consulted with everybody, you would form your final opinion—but not here. What they expect the child advocate to do is do the review, then go to the minister, and also go and see the head of that particular agency before they form a final opinion. That's not independence; that's not even near independence in terms of what you're supposed to be doing. An opinion should be formed independently, based on the facts that you find, not going back like a little school child and saying, "What do you think?" But they don't do that here.

They don't go as far in terms of what I would have thought was a true advocate. I think it's misleading. When people say, "You're going to be my advocate," that means you're going to fight for me, you're going to represent me and you're going to protect me. That doesn't happen here. The child advocate has no investigative powers—none whatsoever. How are they ever going to get to the bottom of what a problem is, other than in a superficial manner in terms of the powers that are provided by this particular bill? They cannot. They've got no investigative powers, they have no right to represent anyone at a tribunal and they have no right to go into a court and do what I would have thought is important in terms of providing true advocacy to a child or a youth.

I know my good friend John Yakabuski—I shouldn't name him by name, but I have to—is going to be speaking on this bill, and there are certainly some serious issues that he has with respect to his riding and also in the military base. I think it's an important issue that has to be addressed.

Of course we support the principle of the bill. What's problematic is in terms of the principle and the spirit of what they're trying to accomplish and the fact that it took them three and a half years to get around this. You would have thought there would have been more on the table. Quite frankly, it's lacking.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: I want to congratulate the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. He raised a number of critical points, including responding to my concern around subsection 15(2). I will have a lot more to say in the next eight minutes in that regard, responding to that section again and other related matters.

But I wonder whether the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford would comment on something that he didn't have an opportunity to respond to because there's so much to say—I understand. On page 6, "Restrictions on entrance"—you might want to comment on this—it says, "Where the advocate seeks to enter a place to communicate with a child or youth, the advocate shall give reasonable notice to the person in charge of that place or

to the person who has custody or control of the child or youth.”

It seems to me that such an officer who is a child advocate and may be reviewing a matter of abuse of any kind being obliged to give reasonable notice to the person in charge of that place or that person who has custody or control of the child or youth is wrong, is a mistake. The child advocate should be able to enter a place without having to give reasonable notice, because in so doing, it permits an institution to obviously correct whatever perception needs to be corrected, to deal with whatever matter could be dealt with in advance of the advocate coming in. That place or institution should not be permitted to have that opportunity. If indeed something wrong is found, the advocate will speak to that; if nothing is found, then the advocate will speak to that. But why give reasonable notice? In my view, it does not make any sense, and I wondered whether you, as a lawyer, have an opinion in that regard.

2020

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I have a few comments. As both members have stated, this is not a big bill. I think it was responded to, and I think that probably each party felt that, indeed, there was a need to respond to this, to a position that we'll review and make sure that children's rights and opportunities are respected. I'd point out to all of the members, the Ombudsman does not have the power to take on a court case either, and neither does the Auditor General. They don't do that. It's quite standard, as the member from Simcoe will certainly know, and others who have been in public accounts, that the Auditor General—it's standard practice, when he does his report or her report, they go back to that ministry with recommendations and ask them their response to the criticism. Now, this one is a little different, mind you. I grant that. But to suggest that this is somehow out of the realm of being able to do review—yes, they can—is perhaps a little misleading.

All I can say is that this bill will go to committee. There may be some technicalities that those of you with legal backgrounds suggest should be reviewed. As we have already stated, we want to make sure that this person is an advocate for children who has the teeth to be able to review circumstances, and that given the position that has been there right now—there has been considerable consultation with that office and with the individuals.

So I am hopeful that we can move this to a successful conclusion, and if there are good suggestions to be made, which I gather the opposition feels it has, then I'm sure that we'll find a way to accommodate that.

Ms. MacLeod: Just on a quick note, to follow the member from Ottawa Centre, last week he announced that he's not going to be running again. I'll be sad when I come back here next year and he won't be here, because since I have been elected in this short year, he and the member from Leeds–Grenville, two deans of this Legislature, have been so kind to me. On a personal note I just want to say that. I appreciate it.

I just wanted to make a few comments to my colleague Mr. Tascona. Bringing his fresh set of eyes to this piece of legislation, I truly appreciate it, because he does bring that legal aspect to the bill, which not all of us have, and I think that we needed it. I think that it was great that—

Interjection.

Ms. MacLeod: There are not enough lawyers in the Legislature. Anyway, I'm not sure that constituents at home will say that.

In any event, he did raise some very valid points with respect to the Board of Internal Economy and how it is dominated by the government. He brought up some issues with respect to systemic reviews, and the true meaning of the advocate. I was very pleased that he raised some of the very issues that I and others critics in this chamber have raised to improve this piece of legislation. What we're expecting is a very spirited debate on the independent child advocate so that it will be improved by the time it concludes committee hearings.

I think that with respect to all of the colleagues in this Legislature who will stand up and bring forth their ideas, it is very important in the consultative process, and I expect that we'll be doing that for the next hour, trying to influence the way this bill will be resolved at the committee stage.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I just wanted to put on the record some unfortunate circumstances that happened in my riding. We talked about a little 8-year-old boy who was murdered saving the lives of a couple of people, Jared Osidacz, and remind members here that we collectively passed a private member's bill, Bill 89, that gives the coroner the responsibility of investigating cases like his. Sunday was the one-year anniversary of his death. There wasn't anybody in here who wasn't trying to work together to come up with a good piece of legislation to protect the lives of children.

I think that's what we're talking about tonight. We're talking about trying to do things better for the protection of our children. I think we should take these recommendations and suggestions seriously, and try to peel back a lot of the rhetoric we're hearing on all sides, because everyone, now and then, tries to score political points. But outside of that, I would recommend very strongly that the accusations being hurled back and forth sometimes need to be toned down a little bit in order for us to focus on the real purpose and what this particular piece of legislation is trying to do. What we are trying to do is create an independent office of the children's advocate, as recommended by the Ombudsman and also previous governments. And this government is making that effort to do so. I think we should stick to the purpose of trying to find out where the flaws are in the bill and correct them as best we can, and when we do go to committee—and it's indicated that we will—that we take the best possible approach in order to accommodate those concerns and those issues that are brought up, because we can't afford to lose any more lives, particularly those of our children. I respectfully suggest that I'm sure that is what's going to happen.

The Acting Speaker: I'll return to the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford for his two-minute reply.

Mr. Tascona: I appreciate the comments from the member for Brant, and I have respect for him. The purpose of the debate is to deal with the flaws in the bill, and I think that's what we've been pointing out here tonight, that there are a lot of flaws. I appreciate the comments of the member from Trinity-Spadina about the restriction on access, and when he talks about giving reasonable notice in a situation where perhaps reasonable notice isn't what has to be given.

I would just compare that to the powers that are given to occupational health and safety officers and the power to employment standards officers with respect to access to property. They do not have to give reasonable notice. They have an entitlement to be on that property, and they have an entitlement to do what they think is necessary to do their job. And if any employer gets in their way, they are going to court or they're going to be in jail for obstructing an officer of that Ministry of Labour in terms of their trying to do their job. I think what the member for Trinity-Spadina is pointing out is a valid point in terms of the officer of the child advocate who wants to enter a property in a situation which does not warrant giving reasonable notice.

I know the Minister of Labour is here tonight; he knows the powers that are given to the health and safety inspectors and the employment standards officers—they're going to be in there, especially health and safety officers. If they think it's a situation where a person is in imminent danger of a health and safety situation, they're in there—bang, no questions.

As for the comments of the member for Ottawa Centre, the Ombudsman deals with government policy decisions which will impact human lives. But what we're dealing with here is an advocate that's been set up to protect children's or youths' lives. That is their direct obligation, to deal with them, not government policy but to protect that child. And to say that they are advocates for them, all I'm saying is let's extend the envelope here to make them true advocates.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Marchese: I'm very happy to debate this bill and welcome those who are able to see this parliamentary channel. It's 8:30 in the evening, and I would say, with all due respect to Mr. Tory, that those who have Rogers Cable will now not be able to see this political channel on channel 72. But it will be on 105, and you'll need a digital box to view this legislative channel. Quite frankly, I've written a letter in this regard. I find it offensive that we should limit access to people's ability to see the political proceedings in this place.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: No, my complaint is against Rogers in terms of what they are doing, and I think it is a serious problem that will limit access to this legislative channel. They, in retort to some of our complaints, are saying, "No, if people call they'll be able to get a service for one year." But they don't say to the good folks that after the

one year, they're going to have to pay the eight bucks, or whatever it is monthly, to have access to this channel. This is one of the best reality TV shows that we've got around, and it used to be free. Now it's not going to be free and people are going to have to pay to be able to access this parliamentary channel. I wanted to make a point of this and tell the good folks who want to protest against it to dial 1-877-776-7886 and complain about what is happening around this particular issue.

2030

Secondly, I want to reinforce the point I made earlier. This is a debate on the bill; politics is about political debate. Usually, it's done for the purposes of making bills better. So when I make reference to page 6, subsection 15(2) with where it says under "Consultation," "The Advocate shall consult with the minister or administrative head after carrying out the systemic review and before forming a final opinion on the subject matter of the review," I find it a serious mistake, and it seriously challenges the independence of the advocate. Even if it were not the case, the perception is that something could happen to the report on the basis that the advocate is asked to consult before forming a final opinion, suggesting that that final opinion could be changed. It may not have to be, it might not be, but it lends itself to the possibility that it could be. That's a problem, and that's serious because the purpose of the bill is to create an independent advocate free of political interference.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I agree with you.

Mr. Marchese: I'm happy to hear the minister agrees with me. That's what the bill and the debate is all about: finding out aspects of bills that could be improved and making a point of it.

The advocate is permitted to issue an annual report to the Legislature as well as discretionary reports directly to the public. However, 30 days' notice to the affected ministry is required. Why 30 days? There is no explanation for that. This is followed in practice by other officers of the Legislature, but the timelines are at their discretion. Nowhere is it in law that it says, in other aspects, where we're dealing with other officers, that they're required to report to affected ministries within a certain period of time. In addition, and what paradoxically complicates it is, they are also given the power to request responses from the ministries, a power that is denied to the advocate. So other advocates, such as the Ombudsman, have the power to request a response from the ministry, but the advocate doesn't have such a power. Why not? She or he should be able to request that the ministry or affected minister respond, but there is no such requirement in the bill. There should be. It could be an oversight; I don't know. But it can be corrected, and that's why we need hearings. They're serious matters, and that's why they're before us in this debate.

There are many other issues dealing with the mandate, scope, powers and limitations. Clearly, they have powers to do a review, a systemic review, but they have limited powers in terms of what they can do. So, if they don't

have the power to summon or enforce the attendance of a witness or compel testimony under oath or compel the production of documents or evidence, then that systemic review will certainly be limited and debilitated, weakened as a result. So what powers do we have to be able to do a systemic review but with limited powers in terms of being able to do that job?

In relation to these issues that I have mentioned, the minister, and hopefully others who will be invited to speak, will address these and other matters that I am about to touch on, which I also believe need to be reviewed.

I want to talk about the method of appointment. There is so much to say, I think I will have to rush through some of these matters. The Liberals promised their new law would require the appointment of the child advocate through an all-party legislative committee. They promised again on March 8, 2003, that under the new law, the advocate would be selected by an all-party legislative committee and report directly to the Legislature.

This bill breaks the promise. Instead, Bill 165 gives the power of appointment to the cabinet—on the advice of the Legislative Assembly, but it gives the power to cabinet. We might give advice, but cabinet has the power to decide on who should be appointed. Why not do as we have done with so many others? I have been a party to the selection of the last two Ombudsmen, and I believe that process works, and works well. So no party has the power to say, “This is the man”—or “woman”—“we want.” It means you get party agreement, which suggests consensus from all three political parties on the appointment that we make. This is sound policy. I believe we need to do that. It’s a promise that the Liberals have made, it’s a promise that they should keep, and it’s something that should be changed when we have these consultations with our stakeholders. This is not a problem. It ought not to be a problem for the government. This is something that is a positive development in what we in this Legislature have been moving to on a number of appointments of officers. So I’m hoping that that will change.

I wanted to speak to the fact that there is an exclusion of the advocate’s mandated groups. I know the minister spoke to this, and at some point she may speak again. But at the moment, the government claims it’s making a simple transfer of responsibilities from the ministry office to an independent officer of the Legislature. However, Bill 165 excludes three client groups currently served by the office of the child and family service advocacy: students in schools for the deaf, schools for the blind and demonstration schools; young people held in police or court holding cells and young people transported to or from police or court holding cells; and young people receiving non-custodial services under the Youth Criminal Justice Act (community service and probation).

The point of the matter is that yes, the ministry wants to deal with this in some fashion, as we heard from the member from Hamilton East, where it says, “Provide

advocacy to children and youth who are not dealt with under CFSA or MCSA, as permitted by regulation. (A current example is the memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education, allowing advocacy on behalf of children attending provincial and demonstration schools.)” So they contemplate some kind of memorandum to deal with the three excluded groups that I talked about. But why do we need to do that? Why are they exempt? Why do we need a separate memorandum? What is the purpose of that? Why not include them in the bill? She, in fact, has jurisdiction over these three groups at the moment. Why not continue with that responsibility and enshrine it in the bill? Quite frankly, I don’t know why the government has done that. They may be able to defend this in committee and that’s fine, and other people who will depute will have an opportunity to state their points of view on this matter.

Another concern I have is with respect to young people’s access to the advocate. The bill does not provide a clear, positive and direct right to access the advocate. Instead, it provides weak access provisions through consequential amendments to the Child and Family Services Act. In other words, the point of this is that some service provider should or will have to tell some child that there is a child advocate they could call or speak to. The problem I have with this is that, first of all, it assumes that all advocates will do their job and advise every child in their care of this power or this child advocate who is there to speak on their behalf. It assumes that that will happen. It doesn’t state how it will happen, but it assumes that these providers will inform them and that, in so doing, the child, the young person, will find it within his or her power to then make the call. We assume that the service providers will provide the telephone number and so on. But why not empower the child to have direct access to the advocate himself or herself? Why not give that person the power? That too is something incomprehensible to me. Why couldn’t we enshrine the right of the child to have direct access to the advocate, enshrine it in law, rather than going through intermediaries who may or may not pass on the information that the advocate exists and that the advocate can be telephoned in such a manner? I believe that that should change. I believe it should be a right of the child to be able to have direct access to the advocate. This too is something that people will be able to speak to.

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I want to raise another issue. I raised it earlier in response to the member from Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford and asked him a question in this regard. One thing that troubles me is the following section on page 6 of this short bill. It has to do with restrictions on entrance: “Where the advocate seeks to enter a place to communicate with a child or youth, the advocate shall give reasonable notice to the person in charge of that place or to the person who has custody or control of the child or youth.” I want to say, in response to this, that this is another serious problem that you have introduced in this bill. The advocate, when dealing with any type of abuse,

when dealing with protection of a child for whatever reason, should not have to inform the person in charge of that place or the person who has custody or control of the child in advance of going. We don't know what reasonable notice means; it's not defined. It could be a day, it could be two, it could be three; we don't know. But why should they be informed? If we're dealing with possible harm and possible abuse, it means that if something is happening, that institution should have no right to prepare in advance or to hide the possible facts or to change the environment in such a way as to create a different kind of positive environment, creating an illusion to the advocate that things are not as bad as they might have been reported. Sorry, we cannot give that advance notice. They should not be given reasonable notice. "Reasonable" sounds reasonable, but it is unreasonable in this respect.

So I'm hoping that people, when given the opportunity to respond to this bill, will come and speak to this and speak to many other aspects of the bill that I may or may not have touched. I know that First Nations people have concerns with this particular bill, and I know that some of us really believe that we should treat aboriginal people as a nation, that they are a nation. They are not immigrants like many of us. They were here before us and have special rights and special privileges, and our relationship to them ought to be treated differently. In relation to this particular issue, they need to have a strong voice on how their children are dealt with as it relates to possible harm to native children. Some are supporting the idea of a deputy child advocate for aboriginal children. First Nations people might be interested to have a totally separate, parallel advocate located in the north to serve First Nations children in both First Nations agencies and mainstream children's aid societies. We have to take this seriously and we have to discuss how we're going to deal with concerns that they have in a way that addresses them as a people, which in my view they are.

The other point regarding the Ombudsman: Since February 14, 2005, the Ombudsman has been demanding oversight of CAS. Having an independent child advocate with the changes that I was speaking to would go a long way to helping young people, but it doesn't replace the fact that if we had an Ombudsman who had oversight over CAS it would be equally good and strong and powerful, because having another person who has oversight over these matters with the powers that the Ombudsman has would be good for everyone. It may seem that it may not be as good to governments, because I have seen the current Ombudsman do many reports on a regular basis and the government has on a regular basis responded to them promptly. I believe this is good. It is not an attack on government, it is not an attack on ministries. It ought to be something that ministries should want to have in place because it protects everyone. Ultimately, if it does good and you as a government respond to it in a positive way, you're doing yourselves good.

It is a difficult thing to accept because when you're in government, you are the ones who have to take

responsibility and, as such, you see it as a criticism of yourselves. I know. Yes, Minister, I know. We've all been there; all of us have been through this circle. Most ministries hide from problems and, to the extent that they can, they will sweep them under the rug as often as they can, to the extent that they can, except where political pressure is brought to bear, and then governments need to respond. But I am telling you what the Ombudsman has done in each and every one of the reports that he has created to which you have had to respond, and to which you did respond, has been a good thing for Ontarians and a good thing for governments, in spite of the negative feelings that you might have towards him each and every time he issues his reports.

We anticipate hearings, and we anticipate hearings across Ontario. We anticipate hearings in the north in particular to give native people an easier opportunity to access our committee, so that they don't have to travel far. We have the ability to do that and I'm assuming that we will find ready and willing MPPs and parliamentary assistants and ministers ready for the call, saying, "Yes, of course we're going to travel across Ontario." We anticipate that you will do that. We anticipate that many will come to the hearings and we anticipate that the bill will be improved as a result of the suggestions that we are making and as a result of the suggestions that other deputants will have to make.

With that, Speaker, I thank you and look forward to the responses.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I would also like to recognize and honour the theatre of debate that has been contributed to by our honourable opponent from Trinity-Spadina, but I wanted to just add some thoughts to tonight's debate.

I think it's a mark of a civilized society, and certainly a McGuinty Liberal government, to empower those individuals in our society who may not necessarily have the loudest voices. And I think that this particular act, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2006, is precisely a mark in that spirit. This legislation, if passed, will in fact better protect the interests of our children and youth by ensuring that no government, current or future, would be able to suppress the voice of the advocate. I think this is a very important point because now, with fixed election dates, with the temperatures and fevers rising because everything is being potentially exploited on a political basis, whether it's budget deficits, reports or audits, I think it's important to separate that from political control. It is very important that we bring forward this particular legislation, as I've mentioned, because it is our responsibility, as a government with a progressive vision, to listen to everyone, and of course that particularly includes children and youth.

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This government believes that when it comes to giving vulnerable children a voice, there can be no room for interference, political, electoral, economic or otherwise. That's why I strongly support this particular act, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments?

Ms. MacLeod: I truly appreciate my colleague from the New Democratic Party's getting engaged in this piece of legislation. As always, he entered the debate in a very spirited way, raising points that I think are valid for this entire Legislature to hear, particularly on the independence of the child advocate for Ontario. I know his party has been working very hard with stakeholders to help improve this bill, which they believe is flawed, and I certainly appreciate the time and effort his critic has put into this legislation as well. I understand that he's going to be here and delivering more two-minute hits and he's going to do his two-minute wrap-up, which we're all really getting excited to hear.

But, in particular, I would like to add some of the concerns that we have as a Conservative caucus on some of the issues, and I would be interested to hear what he thinks: the lack of consultation on this bill, the lack of entrance and the restriction of access, as well as other issues with respect to some key groups that need protection having been left out.

Mr. Leal: They've just fixed up a committee.

Ms. MacLeod: I guess I just got assurance here from the member for Peterborough of the Liberal Party that this will all be dealt with in committee, so I truly appreciate that.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I see that my good friend from Trinity-Spadina is like the Maytag repairman this evening. He doesn't seem to have a colleague to help him out, so I'll try to be as non-partisan as possible. I enjoyed his comments. I want you to know that I support Bill 165 for a couple of simple reasons.

First of all, I'm proud to be a member of a government that decided to have a Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I think it was a very progressive move by our Premier. I would challenge any party that would form a government in the future of Ontario who would say that there shouldn't be a Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I think it is very important around the cabinet table that there is that voice. I know Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, our first minister, did a wonderful job. She's been succeeded by Mary Anne Chambers, who is also doing a tremendous job of moving this agenda forward.

One of the things that we said on the campaign trail, something that other parties did not when they had the opportunity, was to create the child advocate so that he or she would have independence and would report directly to this Legislature. There had been criticism over the years about the necessity for doing this, but no action had been taken. So I am glad we're doing that.

I'm particularly glad that both opposition parties agree in principle with Bill 165. I agree with my good friend the member from Brant that some things transcend partisan politics. I think this bill is one of them. I also note that there has not been a major piece of legislation introduced by our government in the last three and a half

years that has not gone to committee and been amended and substantially strengthened.

I remember working together with the good member from Trinity-Spadina on the spills bill to make it stronger. So we can rise above partisanship when the call is so clarion, which is that we have to do whatever we can to protect our children. We have to make sure that that advocate, who is the voice of the children that is lost, is actually heard no matter what, and no matter what government forms the government of the day here.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Seeing none, I'll return to the member for Trinity-Spadina, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Marchese: I thank the member for Nepean-Carleton. To my good doctor friend from Etobicoke North, I don't quite get it. You didn't respond to anything I said. You spoke softly, but not by speaking softly does your bill improve; I'm sorry. It would have been nice for you to respond to what I said, but you didn't. Then you got the member from Perth-Middlesex equally trying to imitate Sean Conway here, but he said nothing in response to what I said. He said we need to get beyond partisanship. What did you say in response to the comments that I made?

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Member from Middlesex, just quiet down. I talked about the exclusion of the advocate's mandated groups. I talked about young people's access to the advocate. I talked about the advocate's access to the facilities. I talked about the method of appointment. I talked about the fact that subsection 15(2) forces the advocate to meet with the minister before forming a final opinion.

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: But why didn't you respond to that? Johnnie, you went on about this, "Oh, we need to get above partisanship. This is the best bill we've ever produced. We just need to get the opposition parties to work with us." It was just, blah, blah, blah. You said nothing. It would have been nice if you'd just responded to what I said and said, "I disagree with your passionate defence of that or disagree with your passionate defence of that." It would have been nice if you had said, "I disagree with something." But on all the points that I raised, 20 minutes of them, you didn't say a thing except to blah, blah, blah about how great your bill is and that we need to get beyond partisanship because you introduced a bill, you Liberals are so great and we shouldn't have a debate.

So, Johnnie, next time I debate, hopefully you'll be able to respond to the things I'm saying as a way of enhancing the debate. Please, Johnnie, do me a favour next time.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I hope I don't need to remind experienced members of the House that we all need to refer to members by their riding name or by their ministerial title, not by their first name or their surname.

Further debate on the bill?

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): Bill 165 is An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. I was glad to be here yesterday for the leadoff to second reading of this bill and I'm pleased to speak to this legislation this evening. This legislation is part of a package of changes that our government has made to protect our children and youth at risk. It includes of course the new Ministry of Children and Youth Services, which we're all very proud of on this side of the House.

I'd like first of all to speak of another bill, Bill 210, the Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act, passed in late 2006, which is pertinent to this in protecting children. It was an integral part of the McGuinty government's actions to help our children and youth have better outcomes and lives in this province.

Shortly after I was elected, I met with a family lawyer in Orleans, Susan Galarneau, who told me about all the difficulties she was having with adoptions. It was great to get her advice on where we were going, and I remember speaking to the minister at the time. That legislation, which is in place now—and it just started to operate I think in November 2006—provides for more options for children who can't be adopted so they grow up in caring, permanent homes. I think that's so important. I just wanted to mention that in the context of this debate tonight.

It increases the accountability of children's aid societies through an independent, timely complaints process. It allows openness in arrangements that will make it possible for more children to be adopted while keeping important ties to their birth families. When you look at the statistics, we have 9,000 children who are crown wards. If the legislation would reduce that by one child, 100 children or maybe 1,000 children, it's certainly the right direction that we're going in this province. It was a direction that that family lawyer gave me, and I found that that's what the minister at the time went along with and how that legislation developed.

So we're coming up now to this legislation, and I think it's very important. We've heard a lot of discussions tonight, and a lot of them from lawyers, who argue about access: "Where the advocate seeks to enter a place to communicate with a child or youth, the advocate shall give reasonable notice to the person in charge of that place or to the person who has custody or control of the child or youth." They argue whether or not that is proper access: "Every agency or service provider shall provide the advocate with reasonable private access to a child in care or young person in custody who wishes to meet with the advocate." A lot has been around access or what they're telling the child, but I think this has been going on in this province for many years that we've had a child advocate.

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The difference now is that we're going to have the child advocate report to the Legislature, not to the minister. I think we heard from Minister Dombrowsky. The genesis for that I think was the death of children and

of not having the child advocate be able to speak to the Legislature. That was the problem. That muzzling by a minister will not occur in the future. That's why the group of legislation that has come from this government has been building on protecting children and youth, and this is just an excellent piece of legislation that is going to, in many ways, support the protection of children and youth in this province.

There's a lot of discussion tonight on whether some groups are left out. One member said that the new legislation will leave out youth in provincial demonstration schools, schools for the deaf and blind and young people in police holding cells and in police custody. But other people feel that it will not. If regulations are required, then those can be put in place to make sure of that protection there. But one to the things that I'd like to clarify—it was an allegation by the member for Nepean–Carleton that this came about because of the Auditor General shining a light on the children's aid societies. One thing our government did was to introduce the new legislation where the auditor gets into all the government expenditures, including, I believe, hospitals, schools, hydro. Hydro was very enlightening when the Auditor General was able to go in there. And why wouldn't he? This is Ontario money. This causes problems for governments to get all the facts, but that's what the purpose of this is. So this is not the case. We saw the genesis of this. It goes back to the muzzling of the Auditor General. It had nothing to do with the Auditor General shining a light. We asked the Auditor General to look at all the government spending, including the CAS. Certainly they found out information that is going to be beneficial to this government, to move forward with legislation.

It's difficult for me, as an engineer, to sit in this House and hear the lawyers argue the small subtleties. I'm sure that the issues that have been brought up tonight, generally about access—there was one about how you tell a child and about reporting one month before to the minister—how all of those things work. I'm sure that during the committee hearings the changes will be made. Even given all of the rhetoric we've heard from the opposition parties, there's strong support for the independent child advocate legislation, and I'm sure that it's going to move forward. This is a hard way to get confidence in a piece of legislation when you hear all the negatives, when really we're talking about the details, which certainly, if they have to be tweaked, they're tweaked. But generally there is strong support for this. I'm sure that the bill, when it comes into the final stage, will have the support of all of this House. It should have the support of all this House because it is very important for our children and youth.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this tonight. I'm very supportive of this legislation. I'm very supportive of the minister who brought it forward. I'm sure that it's going to make a great deal of difference to the children and youth of this province.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. MacLeod: I just wanted to add my voice, because throughout tonight I've tried to be positive about this legislation and moving forward in a co-operative sense. It's unfortunate that a member of this Legislature, when two political parties in the opposition would say that they want to work co-operatively to improve this legislation, would claim that what we are saying tonight is rhetoric. In fact, what we're doing is to protect the minority against the majority. That is what the role traditionally is of opposition parties, regardless of whether it's in the House of Commons or any Legislative Assembly anywhere in this country. What we're doing here tonight is bringing concerns that we have heard from people across this province, people who are in this Legislature this evening and who were here yesterday who do not have a voice on the floor of this Legislature. We are bringing them to the minister's attention, we are bringing them to your attention so you can improve this piece of legislation based on the needs of the people we represent across this province. I take great umbrage at the fact that a member opposite would say that that is rhetoric.

We have spent an awful lot of time reviewing the bill, reviewing the legislation. I know, for example, our staff at the PCRS worked very hard—Jessica Oliver, my own staff, Aaron Bradley and Stephen Gilman and myself. I spent a lot of time this weekend and in the weeks before that consulting with dozens of children's groups across the province to make sure that we get this bill right. I've read almost every paper there has been by DCI and by Voices for Children.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Name them.

Ms. MacLeod: Of course, we'll get heckled by the Minister of Agriculture, who's not in her seat, because they can't understand that at the 11th hour it is not appropriate to bring in legislation that is either going to be rushed or die on the order paper just so that they—

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): You muzzled them.

Ms. MacLeod: I did no such thing. I was elected less than a year ago. You know it; everyone else here knows it. I'm here entering in good faith to work with your minister, and you guys are unprepared to do that because you just want this to die—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I'd hate to have to start naming members at this late hour.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Marchese: I happen to agree with the member from Nepean—Carleton on this issue. We're debating an issue that people feel strongly about. I don't think that what you've been hearing from many people is all about partisanship, as you have put it, many of you.

I want to say to the member from Ottawa—Orléans that Joe Tascona, the member from Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford, is a lawyer, but most of the comments that you might have been speaking to were also references that I made, and I happen not to be a lawyer. You don't have to be a lawyer to raise the issues that have been raised by people like me—a former teacher. The whole issue of the inde-

pendence of the child advocate is not just a legalistic issue. You didn't respond to it, but on page 7, where I talked about section 15(2), that section, in my view, limits, if not in anything else at least in perception, the independence of the child advocate. That's not partisanship; that's not just a lawyer talking; it could be anyone speaking, and it happened to be me articulating that concern. I happened to hear the minister agreeing with me when I said this, and that's a positive thing. We're improving a bill, and you should take it in that light. I don't hear, from any of the opposition members whom I've heard, partisanship or just playing politics with this particular issue.

So I just caution some of you. We have raised many concerns, and some of them will come up over and over again in committee hearings. You will hear them, and you'll have an opportunity to listen to them, to debate them, and to make changes if you wish. That's what we're doing with this debate.

Mr. Wilkinson: I'm glad to enter back into the debate just to help the good people at home who are listening, and particularly the people who have come to the gallery tonight, to explain the legislative process, in the sense that we are debating here, at second reading debate, Bill 165. But to have the changes that are being proposed by the opposition, which we take in good faith, requires the bill to be amended. That means it has to go to committee. So the first question is: Is the government committed to taking the bill to committee? Answer: yes.

Second: Do we have the minister's ear, because it's the minister who will determine whether or not there will be amendments brought forward by the government? I can assure you, if they're brought forward by the government, since we have a majority at the moment, those amendments will pass. Do we have the interest of the minister, the minister of the crown, not her parliamentary assistant? The minister of the crown is here for the entire debate taking notes. I would say to those people who are concerned about this bill, you couldn't ask for a better minister tonight than the one we have here in the province of Ontario, the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers. I, as a member of the McGuinty government, will take my lead from the minister. That's who I listen to in regard to what will happen in committee.

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We're having a debate so that people can share their views. We agree that the opposition are bringing up valid points, and that is their right. We are not debating that they are wrong; we are saying, "Let us hear those points," and that is what they are doing: They're debating the bill before us. But the ability to change the bill rests with the minister—she is here this evening—and that is the way under our democracy that bills can be improved and strengthened.

I want to say to the people who have tuned into this debate, and those who are here tonight, that you are being heard. Whether you have the ability to speak in this debate or not, your voice is being heard. Your concerns are being recognized because, in my opinion, we have a

minister who cares. She is busily taking down all of the suggestions made to strengthen this bill in a spirit of tripartisanship.

The Acting Speaker: We have time for one last question or comment. If not, I'll return to the member for Ottawa-Orléans, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. McNeely: I guess the member for Perth-Middlesex put it a little bit better than I. We're talking about legislation that has had a great deal of input from the former and the present advocates for children and youth, who have worked in the system for many years. I'm sure that some of the suggestions that have come from the opposition tonight will be part and parcel of the committee hearings on the bill.

I wanted to get on the record—I think it's been put on the record before—that the reason this bill is coming up at this time now has nothing to do with the Auditor General looking at the children's aid societies. That was part and parcel of our government's way of improving government, making sure that the auditor was looking at all government spending. This is part of our program for children. There have been a lot of improvements for children in legislation in this province, including some with the Ministry of Transportation, which I'm with now.

Those are the issues that are important to the opposition. We've heard them tonight. I look forward to this bill, in its amended form, coming back for third reading. I think it's extremely important to our province, our kids and our youth. That's what our interest is and that's the direction we're going.

I'm very pleased, Minister, that you've brought this forward. I'm very pleased with the bill from a non-lawyer perspective as it is now. I'm sure it will be improved as we get through the committee hearings. I'm in support of the bill and look forward to it coming through. Our kids and our youth need it in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm pleased to join the debate tonight, and it is called a "debate." It's called "second reading debate." I didn't think that it was called "second reading agreement" or "second reading capitulation" or anything like that. It's called "second reading debate." So if members of the opposition have issues with a bill, even though we all support the bill in principle, I think this is the opportunity to raise those issues before Parliament.

I want to touch on something the member for Trinity-Spadina spoke about, and that is access to this very debate on the part of the public. He talked about Rogers shifting this channel up to channel 105, which means you have to have a digital cable box in order to get it. But at least if you have cable in the city, you have access to a cable box. You will have to pay more, you'll have to increase the fees you're paying every month, but you have access to a box. What about the people in rural Ontario who, if they are satellite dish subscribers through Bell ExpressVu, have no access to this channel whatsoever? Shame on Bell ExpressVu. You can get the Saskatchewan parliamentary channel broadcast in

Ontario, but you cannot get this Parliament broadcast on Bell ExpressVu in the province of Ontario, Canada's most populous and important province, I dare say. To chastise Rogers is right. That was wrong for them to move that up the ladder to number 105 or whatever; I believe it's 105. I happen to have a cable box, so I still get it. I'll be able to watch this at 2 in the morning and see how I did. But at home in Barry's Bay, where I'm a Bell ExpressVu subscriber—are you listening, Bell?—you cannot get the Ontario parliamentary channel on Bell ExpressVu. Shame on them. That's something that should be corrected.

I see a lot of rural members on both sides of the House. I'm sure their constituents would like to have the opportunity not only to see what their member is up to but what all members of this House are up to when we're here at 9:15 or 9:16 at night. You know what? We're not all watching the Leafs. Some of us actually have to be sitting in here debating because we're having second reading debate on Bill 165. So let's get to the debate.

A number of points have been raised. One of them is the appointment of this advocate and what role all parties are going to play in the appointment of that advocate. I would think it would behoove the government to involve all parties, because this is a non-partisan, supposedly independent advocate working on behalf of children, and what more important cause to be working on behalf of than children? Many of the people—I would dare say, most of the people in this House—are probably parents of children; some are grandparents. You cannot overstate the importance of children or the fundamental primacy of the need for someone to be acting on their behalf, whether it's their parents or someone else. Someone must act on their behalf.

I applaud the government for moving on this. I might want to remind them that the first government to have a child advocate was the Progressive Conservative government under Bill Davis back in the 1970s.

I think it would behoove this government to ensure that all parties have a role in the selection of this advocate, and to free that advocate. If you go to the clause that the member from Trinity-Spadina was talking about on page 7, subsection 15(2): "The advocate shall consult with the minister or administrative head after carrying out the systemic review and before forming a final opinion on the subject matter of the review."

Right off the bat, you have to question not only the independence but the power of the advocate. If it's a toothless tiger, it's not worth having. If you're not going to give it the teeth that are necessary, then this bill is more about talk than it is about substance, because the advocate can't be answerable to the minister. In fact, the opposite should be the truth. The advocate, on behalf of children, should not be subject to the minister reviewing his or her work and saying, "Well, I like that. No, I don't like that. You're going to have to change this, and then I might support it." But the appointment of that advocate in itself by all parties is important.

I want to shift gears a little bit to a more local issue that has everything to do with child advocacy. The

Minister of Children and Youth Services is here tonight, and that's wonderful because she'll be very familiar with the situation I'm about to talk about, and that is—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Make sure you get it right.

Mr. Yakabuski: Oh, I have it right, let me assure you, madam. That is about the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families in my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. In September, the Phoenix Centre, along with Lieutenant Colonel Dave Rundle, the base commander of CFB Petawawa, made an urgent appeal to the minister for additional funds to deal with extraordinary circumstances that they were placed under as a result of the huge increase in the number of military families requiring mental health services due to the deployment in Afghanistan. The request was for some \$200,000 in additional funding to provide two caseworkers—let me get this right so the minister won't say I'm wrong—two therapists and two child youth counsellors over two years, so some 200-and-some-thousand dollars over each of the next two years.

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The minister turned them down flat. I spoke to the minister directly on this and she said, "The federal government should be dealing with this." Then she said, "We have no extra money," yet they've been going around writing cheques. The only thing they're running out of is ink, the way they've been writing cheques in the last couple of months.

Then we made another appeal to the minister. Here in this House, in December, the minister came to me and she said, "You know what, John? We're going to do something to help the Phoenix Centre." I thought, "That's wonderful." We get the letter, and it's nothing—absolutely nothing, not a nickel.

What happens now? We had to actually go to a press conference to raise this issue publicly. You know who has become involved in this? The Ombudsman himself. The Ombudsman has taken an interest in this issue. So the minister—who, in the absence of a child advocate, you would think would be the principal—the Minister of Children and Youth Services; who could think more of the welfare of children in this province? But what are they doing? What is she saying? "No." The waiting list in CFB Petawawa in Renfrew county has quadrupled. She is now in a jurisdictional tug-of-war argument, saying that the federal government should be paying for this.

Everybody knows that health care—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the House to come to order and allow the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to make his presentation.

I return to the member.

Mr. Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't really bother me; I'm used to it, because I've been known to heckle myself on occasion.

So the minister has said that this is the responsibility—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat. I'll say it again: I would ask the House to come to order so as to allow the member to make his presentation. He may be used to it but I'm not.

I'll return to the member.

Mr. Yakabuski: She said, "This is the responsibility of the federal government." You know and everybody in this House knows that health care is the responsibility of the provincial government, even though you continue to charge health care premiums, the tax, to members of the military, whose health care is provided for by the federal government, but the health care of—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke continues to present information that is not accurate. I think the member should know that children's mental health agencies are not funded by OHIP.

The Acting Speaker: There's no point of order.

I'll return to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to continue his presentation.

Mr. Yakabuski: Perhaps we could get more time on the clock, Mr. Speaker.

I didn't say that it was the Ministry of Health's responsibility; I said that it was the responsibility of the provincial government. If you would listen instead of always wanting to interrupt, you might learn something.

She continues to have this argument—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the House again: We have five minutes and then we'll be able to conclude this debate. I would ask the Minister for Children and Youth Services and the Minister of Economic Development to refrain from heckling the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I'll return to the member.

Mr. Yakabuski: She continues to maintain that this is the responsibility of the federal government. She actually went on record in the newspaper saying, "Look, the federal government sent these people over to fight in Afghanistan, so whatever fallout comes from that is the federal government's responsibility." That's the kind of leadership we get out of this Liberal government. In the meantime, who is being victimized? Who is being victimized while she has this battle? It is the children of military families and other families in Renfrew county who are also subjected to the same waiting list, Minister—the same waiting list. So while you have your battle with the federal government, your little tug-of-war, those children are waiting for mental health services. If you want to start advocating on behalf of children, Renfrew county, CFB Petawawa, is a wonderful place to start.

I say to you, Madam Minister, when Mr. Marin finishes his report and comes back and says—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Would the member please take his seat.

I will not tolerate further interjections from the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I've asked you now three times.

I'll return to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. Yakabuski: It's tough to keep a train of thought around here.

I say to the minister, if you want to advocate on behalf of children who are being left and victimized as a result of your refusal—this is a government that has had a \$20-billion increase in spending. Is it short of money? When Mr. Marin wrapped them over the knuckles over their abject failure with regard to the victims of crime, they came up with \$20 million as quick as I can snap my fingers. Is there a shortage of money? No. Is there a shortage of commitment to children? I would have to ask that question of the minister. But the evidence points to a questionable commitment on the part of you, Minister. So if you're not going to stand up for the children of military families when they need it the most—right now, in Renfrew county—who are you standing up for as the Minister of Children and Youth Services?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: I'm warning the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

There are two minutes to go. I'll return to the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. Yakabuski: This is like a yoyo. It's like a toilet seat here today: up/down, up/down. It's very difficult. I can assure you that I have never caused anybody on the other side to have to be up and down that often.

The minister has, I guess, two choices here. She's going to be forced to make a decision when the Ombudsman comes back. I am absolutely confident that when the Ombudsman's report comes out, he's going to rule that it is your responsibility, not the federal government's responsibility, to provide mental health services through your Ministry of Children and Youth Services. You have a choice of dealing with it then—or, I would say, the proactive thing would be to deal with it now. We're not talking about a substantial sum of money, but we're talking about a great deal of good that could be done with that money to the children of Renfrew county.

The Acting Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2128.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 21 March 2007

Mercredi 21 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Acting Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffière par intérim
Deborah Deller

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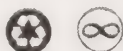
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 21 March 2007

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): People in Waterloo–Wellington and Halton Hills know that the McGuinty Liberal government's record is one of broken promises, weak leadership and misplaced priorities. It is a fact that Dalton McGuinty is spending at least \$20 billion a year more than when he came into office three and a half years ago.

In spite of this spending spree, the communities I represent are not receiving the financial support they need from the province for vital infrastructure projects. The towns of Minto and Halton Hills are asking that municipalities which have been shut out of three rounds of COMRIF funding be compensated for the costs of their applications. They make a good point, and as of this morning 99 municipalities had passed resolutions in agreement.

While at the ROMA-Good Roads conference three weeks ago, I heard from many local councillors. For example, the township of Centre Wellington has 104 bridges, and a third of them need work now. They also need help with their Elora water pollution control plant expansion. Recently, I heard from the county of Wellington, the region of Halton, the township of Puslinch and the town of Erin on their transportation needs, and they are showing leadership and vision that the McGuinty government is not. Soon the House will hear more from me on that.

When it comes to recreation projects so important to our quality of life, health and wellness, communities like Elmira, Mount Forest and Acton have received short shrift from this government when they needed provincial support.

This government wasted \$400 million to expand the Windsor casino and entice more people to gamble there. That is money that should have been spent on rural infrastructure projects or any number of other, more pressing priorities. Let's hope that tomorrow's budget responds to the needs of the people of Ontario.

NOWRUZ

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): Willowdale has one of the largest and most vibrant Iranian communities

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 21 mars 2007

in Canada. Today marks the first day of spring on the Iranian and Canadian calendars. In Farsi, one welcomes this holiday by saying "Nowruz Mobarak," or "Happy New Year." The word "Nowruz" means "new day" and has become a symbol of renewal, hope and prosperity for nearly 100,000 Iranians here in Ontario.

Iranian Canadians are an integral part of this province, especially in Willowdale, where they enrich the professional and social landscape of the riding. I'm honoured by the many invitations I have received to celebrate this holiday. In particular, I would like to thank the parents, children and staff at Zange Ghesheh for inviting me to their wonderful 16th annual Persian new year performance under the direction of Mrs. Pary Missaghi. This event celebrated Persian dance, theatre and music. Events like these are special because they expose us to diverse traditions found in our multicultural society. I want to thank the Iranian community for their invitation to Canadians from all cultures and all beliefs to take part in their celebrations.

HUNTLEY CENTENNIAL PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): Tomorrow night, I will be at the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board to speak in support of a motion to expand Huntley Centennial Public School in Carp.

On February 7, I toured the school with local trustee Lynn Scott and parent Tracey Brown. The need for an expansion is obvious. Huntley Centennial currently has an enrolment of 555 students in a building which should have a maximum of 360 students. This year, the school has nine portables, and next year, when the 20-student cap is in place up to grade 3, the school will need 15 portables. Quite frankly, there's not enough space on the existing site to place the additional six portables.

This school is already overcrowded, and with new subdivisions planned in the community, Huntley Centennial desperately needs an addition. Today I call on the McGuinty government to provide the necessary funding to help overcrowded schools accommodate the additional classes created at least in part by the 20-student cap. I ask that Huntley Centennial in Carp be one of the first to be given consideration for that much-needed funding.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): York South–Weston has the second-lowest average household

income of all ridings in our province. Indeed, the average household income is barely more than the hefty \$40,000 pay hike the Premier gave himself four days before Christmas.

Thousands of my constituents struggle mightily each and every day to make ends meet. Newcomers labour at two and three minimum-wage-paying jobs just to be able to cover the rent and put food on the table. Single mothers struggle to afford the cost of basics for their kids, basics like winter coats and boots. Young people cram as many hours of part-time work as they can into their hectic schedules in order to keep up with the escalating cost of post-secondary education.

These constituents deserve a real raise, not next year or the year after or the year after that; they deserve a real raise today. That's why I'm calling for a \$10 minimum wage now. It's about fairness for the lowest-paid working Ontarians. A couple of days after my by-election victory, the Premier's sidekick, the Minister of Finance, audaciously declared, while licking his electoral wounds, that poverty was now his issue. Well, where I come from, talk is dirt cheap.

Tomorrow, the minister has an opportunity to rise above his own rhetoric. He can walk the walk and deliver a \$10 minimum wage now. Sadly, if today's headlines are correct, he won't. Instead, he'll deliver measly crumbs for the working poor: nickels and dimes here, quarters there, maybe a whole dollar in three or four years' time. All the while, the working poor will fall further and further behind as the minister laughs all the way to the bank each and every month to cash his raise.

ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Today, March 21, is not only the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination but also a historic day in the history of Ontario and the British Empire: 214 years ago today, on March 21, 1793, our culture of human rights and freedoms and our possibilities for racial reconciliation were advanced.

On this day in 1793, the voice of Chloe Cooley was heard resisting bondage as she was dragged from Canada across the Niagara River to be sold. As a result, John Graves Simcoe, first Lieutenant Governor of the newly incorporated province of Upper Canada, responded to the call of Chloe Cooley by championing the first anti-slavery legislation in the British Empire. In the first sitting of the first Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada, the anti-slave-trade bill passed in the Legislative Assembly on July 9, 1793. It predates the British Parliament's 1807 abolishment of the slave trade by 14 years and gives Ontario the distinction of being the first in the British Empire to abolish the slave trade, thus leading the way for a more civilized world. It opened the way for the underground railway refugees to follow the North Star in the quest for freedom in our province.

1340

On the same day in 1960, of course, we all recall what happened in Sharpeville, South Africa. Police opened fire

and killed 69 students protesting against apartheid laws adopted by the South African government.

March 21 has been recognized by the United Nations as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Let us note this historic day and honour the legacy of Chloe Cooley, John Graves Simcoe and other 18th-century human rights, anti-slavery and anti-racism pioneers from this province and the students of Sharpeville in South Africa.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean-Carleton): It's hard to follow that, but tomorrow is budget day in Ontario, and as the official opposition critic for children and youth, I'm hoping there will finally be good news in this budget for children's mental health issues. For far too long, children's mental health issues have been ignored in this province. Of particular concern: Children's mental health has been the subject of systemic underfunding and, of course, stigma.

The children's mental health community is doing what they can on limited resources. In this Legislature, the official opposition has raised the \$3 million the McGuinty Liberals are cutting from health care and children's mental health in Durham region. I am told that over 300 people went out to protest that cut last night—and the ongoing crisis, of course, in military communities right across this province, where the minister herself is not helping kids in crisis on those military bases.

The federal government gets this. They know that children's mental health in Ontario needs an immediate budget increase. I'm calling on the McGuinty government to give \$40 million in this budget so we can spend more money on serving kids, on prevention and intervention, and have more stable and long-term funding. As I said, the federal government gets it. That's why they have developed a national commission to address children's mental health right across this country, with \$10 million over the first two years and \$15 million each year after that. About one in six children across Canada suffers from mental illness. If undetected and untreated early, it can develop into a chronic problem.

Today, I call on the members opposite, the McGuinty Liberal government, to do the right thing: Follow the lead of the federal government and—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): On March 6, I had the pleasure of welcoming the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to Ottawa-Orléans for an important education announcement. We announced that \$1.2 million would be invested to provide Ontarians living in underserved communities with better access to post-secondary education.

The funding will be used to expand the award-winning Contact North program, a distance-education training network, by building five new educational access centres in southern and eastern Ontario. These access centres will allow students to attend virtual classes at different universities, colleges and school boards in southern Ontario via audioconferencing, videoconferencing and e-learning technologies. I'm very proud to announce that one of these centres will be built at Cairine Wilson Secondary School in Ottawa-Orléans.

By incorporating this educational service centre into a high school, we are expanding the career choices of local high school students who want to earn dual credits and develop their skills. This in turn will keep more students in school until they graduate by providing them with more choices that appeal to them. It will also increase the employability of these students after they graduate, because knowledge of technical subjects and trades will be in high demand in our increasingly technical world.

This announcement builds on our government's ambitious plans to revitalize the education system and ensure Ontarians are receiving the best education possible. I would like to thank the minister for making this initiative possible and for travelling all the way to my riding of Ottawa-Orléans to participate in a very exciting announcement. Thanks to Minister Bentley and his hard-working staff, Ontarians are well on their way to becoming the most skilled and knowledgeable workers in the world.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): More good news for the riding of Huron-Bruce: In late February, we had the pleasure of having the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Honourable George Smitherman, in my riding to make announcements to the communities of Exeter and Kincardine. They will provide \$1.75 million in funding to cover hospital redevelopment costs and to help provide better access to health care for the residents of both areas.

Of this funding, the South Huron Hospital Association emergency department in Exeter received a \$1-million investment from the province that will go towards the renovation of the existing facility. The central focus of these renovations is to improve the comfort, efficiency and safety of the hospital's emergency care by modernizing and reorganizing the emergency department to improve patient flow, further improving health and safety standards. There will also be a portion of the funding allocated toward upgrading the ventilation system.

The South Bruce Grey Health Centre in Kincardine also received funding, in the amount of \$750,000. That will go toward the preplanning for renovations and expansion of an aging facility, including increasing the hospital's capacity for emergency and ambulatory care. Kincardine continues to be an area of high growth, and these additional dollars will go a long way to providing residents of the community with improved access to health care at the facility.

The McGuinty government is dedicated to strengthening our health care system in rural communities across Ontario.

CITY OF CORNWALL

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): On February 17 of this year, the Ottawa Citizen ran a story that indicated that Cornwall can serve as a model for other communities, demonstrating what to do upon the loss of a key employer. The article highlights the Cornwall comeback story and explains how the city has started to diversify its economy to compensate for the recent loss of businesses like Domtar.

Cornwall has welcomed new employers such as the Wal-Mart distribution centre, which has seen continuous expansions in recent years, and Teleperformance Canada. It has seen the creation of new small businesses like restaurants such as Schnitzels, Athens and The Sports Page on the Pitt Street promenade. The year 2006 served as a banner year for construction, and the services sector has also seen outstanding growth.

The citizens of Cornwall as well as communities like Chesterville and Iroquois have continuously demonstrated their willingness to create opportunities for themselves. This government has been a willing partner in helping these rural communities in this time of transition. We have acted on this front, investing millions of dollars in infrastructure, training programs, health care, culture, and many other sectors.

There are great opportunities available in Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, and these are increasingly being recognized across the province and beyond. I encourage families and businesses to look to the east for places to set up new facilities and to make a home.

VISITOR

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I just want to introduce someone well known to many here who is in attendance today: Susan Gapka, who is one of our noted trans-activists in the community. Welcome, Susan.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would like to bring to the attention of the members that we are having some technical difficulties with the antique clock at the opposite end of the chamber, so you may find a discrepancy between the digital clocks on the wall and the one at the far end. The ones on the wall and the ones on your wrists will be the ones that rule.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 62(c), the supplementary estimates,

2006-07, of the Office of the Assembly before the standing committee on estimates are reported back to the House, as they were not selected by the committee for consideration, and are deemed to be received and concurred in.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CONDOMINIUM AMENDMENT ACT, 2007 LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CONDOMINIUMS

Mr. Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Condominium Act, 1998 / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur les condominiums.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Several amendments are made to the Condominium Act, 1998. The act is amended to require that every declaration contain the standard provisions set out in the regulations. A review board is established under part XIII.1. The review board's objects include advising the public on matters relating to condominiums, assisting in resolving disputes and providing information to condominium corporations and owners of condominium units on matters of concern to them. The bill provides that an administrator for a corporation be appointed by the review board, and a duty of fair dealing is imposed on all declarants and condominium corporations in their dealings with owners and purchasers of condominium units.

1350

TOBY'S ACT (RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION BECAUSE OF GENDER IDENTITY), 2007 LOI TOBY DE 2007 SUR LE DROIT À L'ABSENCE DE DISCRIMINATION FONDÉE SUR L'IDENTITÉ DE GENRE

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 186, An Act to amend the Human Rights Code respecting gender identity / Projet de loi 186, Loi modifiant le Code des droits de la personne en ce qui concerne l'identité de genre.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): Toby's Act is named after one of Canada's great musicians. Toby Dancer was a producer of Ian Tyson albums, a

studio musician and a transsexual. This bill adds two words to the Human Rights Code, "gender identity," so that people who are transsexual or transgender can be protected along with their lesbian, gay and bisexual brothers and sisters. Currently, as Barbara Hall has attested in the Toronto Star, this protection is not extended to them, despite the abuse, oppression and discrimination the trans community has faced. We want to change that and ask that this bill be made law by this government immediately, before another life in that community is lost. In honour of the life that was Toby Dancer's.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 21, 2007, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has moved government motion number 271. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1353 to 1358.

The Speaker: Members please take their seats. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol
Balkissoon, Bas	Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.
Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Oraziotti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Patten, Richard
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Peters, Steve
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Pupatello, Sandra
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Chan, Michael	Matthews, Deborah	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Amott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	O'Toole, John
Bisson, Gilles	MacLeod, Lisa	Ouellette, Jerry J.
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
Ferreira, Paul	Martel, Shelley	Runciman, Robert W.
Hardeman, Ernie	Martiniuk, Gerry	Savoline, Joyce
Hudak, Tim	Miller, Norm	Tabuns, Peter
Klees, Frank	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John

The Acting Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 48; the nays are 21.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: With us in the members' gallery today we have York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge, Councillor Harold Usher from the city of London, Mary Williamson from the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre, and Dr. Jean Augustine and members of the Ontario Bicentenary Commemorative Committee on the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: We're also joined by two other quite wonderful people from the city of London today. I'd like to introduce Stephanie Shreve, the diversity officer with the London police department, and Don McKinnon, who is head of the hate crimes unit there. Welcome.

ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

ABOLITION DU COMMERCE DES ESCLAVES

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, 1807, and for each party to be allowed to speak to the motion for up to five minutes, following which the question shall be put on the motion without debate or amendment.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I move, on behalf of the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and NDP caucuses:

Be it resolved:

That the Legislative Assembly recognizes that the 25th of March, 2007, marks the 200th anniversary of the passage by the British Parliament of An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807;

To acknowledge that this trade in human beings was an affront to the core values of our society, to our sense of justice and our reverence for human dignity and freedom;

To acknowledge that the slave trade and slavery is at the historical root of and has contributed to the social and economic inequality that continues to affect people of African descent;

To acknowledge that this legislation contributed greatly to the passage in 1834 of the first act to abolish slavery through the British Empire;

To honour the memory of those who suffered and died as a result of slavery or resisting enslavement and those who fought for its abolition in Ontario and around the world;

To recall with sorrow that slavery was practised on Ontario's soil;

To recall that in 1793—a mere two years after its establishment—Upper Canada, as Ontario was then known, passed An Act to prevent the further introduction of Slaves, and to limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude within this Province, and that this act was the first to limit slavery in the British Empire, although it did not end enslavement;

To recall also with pride the role that Ontarians later played in the Underground Railroad, which was an operation roughly from 1815 to 1865, and the courage of those who helped enslaved Africans escape from the United States to freedom in our province; and

To acknowledge that this day has been designated by United Nations as the international day for the commemoration of this event,

The Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, on behalf of the people of Ontario,

Joins Parliaments and governments around the world in marking this event of global historic significance;

Condemns racism and reaffirms our belief in diversity, inclusion and equality; and

Condemns bonded labour and any and all forms of slavery and human trafficking that continue to exist under various guises around the world today.

Today is—

The Speaker: One moment.

Mr. Colle has moved,

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognizes that the 25th of March, 2007, marks the 200th anniversary of the passage by the British Parliament of An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807;

"To acknowledge that this trade in human beings was an affront to the core values of our society, to our sense of justice and our reverence for human dignity and freedom;

"To acknowledge that the slave trade and slavery is at the historical root of and has contributed to the social and economic inequality that continues to affect people of African descent;

"To acknowledge that this legislation contributed greatly to the passage in 1834 of the first act to abolish slavery throughout the British Empire;

"To honour the memory of those who suffered and died as a result of slavery or resisting enslavement and those who fought for its abolition in Ontario and around the world;

"To recall with sorrow that slavery was practised on Ontario's soil;

"To recall that in 1793—a mere two years after its establishment—Upper Canada, as Ontario was then known, passed An Act to prevent the further introduction of Slaves, and to limit the term of Contracts for Servitude within this Province, and that this act was the first to

limit slavery in the British Empire, although it did not end enslavement;

"To recall also with pride the role that Ontarians later played in the Underground Railroad, which was in operation roughly from 1815 to 1865, and the courage of those who helped enslaved Africans escape from the United States to freedom in our province; and

"To acknowledge that this day has been designated by the United Nations as the international day for the commemoration of this event,

"The Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, on behalf of the people of Ontario,

Joins Parliaments and governments around the world in marking this event of global historic significance;

"Condemns racism and reaffirms our belief in diversity, inclusion and equality; and

"Condemns bonded labour and any and all forms of slavery and human trafficking that continue to exist under various guises around the world today."

Hon. Mr. Colle: Today is the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, so it is fitting that members join in unanimous support of efforts to combat racism.

J'invite tous les députés à donner avec moi leur appui entier à la lutte contre le racisme.

In the early 1500s, in the contest to build empires, the evil practice of kidnapping and enslaving African men, women and children began. A vile period in history for more than 300 years, the systemic destruction of families, communities and societies was institutionalized and accepted in the name of economic gain.

March 25 is the 200th anniversary of the passage of the law that abolished the transatlantic slave trade in the British Empire. William Wilberforce introduced the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, which prohibited British ships from transporting and trafficking Africans for the purpose of slavery.

In the spirit of last year's United Nations resolution which called for the global commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, our government is marking this bicentenary with year-long projects. Ontario joins Nova Scotia, Britain, Ireland, Scotland, Ghana, Jamaica, St. Vincent, the US Virgin Islands and Trinidad and Tobago in commemorating this anniversary.

Ontario's aim is to remember, educate and commemorate the history of slavery and its abolition in our province. It is a part of Canada's untold history. C'est un chapitre peu connu de l'histoire du Canada.

1410

On this very day in 1793, a presentation was made to the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, and other members of the executive council that would eventually lead to groundbreaking legislation and the first steps towards the abolition of slavery. In 1793, a full 14 years before the 1807 British law, Simcoe passed legislation that limited the introduction of slaves into Upper Canada after Chloe Cooley, a slave, resisted being bound and taken by force to New York state for sale.

Other courageous Ontarians, like Mary Ann Shadd, Henry Bibb, Lucie and Thornton Blackburn and Reverend Josiah Henson, played a role in Ontario's abolition movement.

In 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act did not end slavery, but it sent a strong signal that its end was near. To recognize this defining moment in our history, our government has created the Ontario Bicentennial Commemorative Committee on the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. The committee consists of individuals from academia, historical societies, archivists, the arts and the African-Canadian community. It will help to motivate action across the cultural, faith and community sectors to ensure that the bicentenary creates a lasting impact. From Buxton to Ottawa, from Niagara Falls to Owen Sound, communities across Ontario will be engaged.

Up to \$1 million will support commemorative projects that tell Ontario's story of slavery and honour those who fought to end it.

I would like to acknowledge the committee members who are with us today in the gallery, and I would also like to acknowledge the students from Carleton Village Public School and Brookview Middle School who have joined us today on this historic occasion.

In closing, I would like to quote Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, on the importance of commemorating the bicentenary. She said:

"The bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act is important to Canadians because it reminds us of the legacy of slavery in Canada and of the efforts that citizens continue to display every day to build a more just and equitable society. We all have much to learn from these heroes—slaves, lawmakers, community and religious leaders, and ordinary citizens—who dared to dream of a better world. And by their audacity, they helped put an end to one of the most barbaric chapters in our history."

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): It is my privilege on behalf of John Tory and the Ontario PC caucus to join in the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the passage into law of the Abolition of the Slave Trade bill passed by the British Parliament on March 25, 1807, and to express our support for the motion before the House.

It is fitting that we make this commemoration on the international day for the elimination of racism, since the act of 1807 constituted an important first step in the process to combat racism effectively, a process that is ongoing and continues today.

By way of historical background, it was in February 1806 that Lord Grenville, in a passionate speech before the House of Lords, argued that the slave trade was contrary to the principles of justice, humanity and sound policy. He criticized his fellow members for not having abolished the trade long ago. Thereafter, the Abolition of the Slave Trade bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament. The group of anti-slavery parliamentarians responsible for this historic act was led by the great

abolitionist and member of Parliament William Wilberforce. Wilberforce committed himself to such causes as the promotion of public education and parliamentary reform, but, above all, his fame rests upon his persistent, uncompromising and single-minded crusade for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. He died one month before Parliament put an end to slavery in the British dominions on August 1, 1834, which, as we know, is known as Emancipation Day.

His immediate influence was not limited to Britain alone. John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, was deeply inspired by his words and his example, so much so that in 1793, when this House came into existence at Newark, Simcoe ensured that the first bills on the order of business tabled attacked the pernicious institution of slavery in Upper Canada, almost 15 years before the act of 1807. Simcoe's efforts strengthened the resolve of Britain to finally end the enslavement of Africans in Canada and indeed throughout the British dominions on August 1, 1834.

For African-American slaves fleeing northward to Canada and to freedom, it was the Underground Railroad that became their lifeline. One of its famous conductors was Harriet Ross Tubman, who personally helped free hundreds of slaves, earning her the nickname Moses. In 1863, Harriet Tubman led an expedition during which nearly 800 slaves were brought to safety and freedom. As she liked to say, "We act up to the light we have." Today, we celebrate her as a person who made it her life's business indeed to "live up to the light" that she had.

The struggle against the slavery of Africans and racial discrimination was furthered by the life work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In the words of Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, president of the Ontario Black History Society, "Martin Luther King has come to be a symbol of freedom, social justice and equality in the world."

I would like to take this opportunity to gratefully recognize Dr. Sadlier and the Ontario Black History Society for its tireless work in promoting African heritage and culture and especially Ontario Black History Month for the past three decades.

In honour of the 200th anniversary of the act of 1807, I tabled my private member's bill to proclaim Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Ontario, and I ask all members to give it their full support when it comes before the House.

In commemorating the 200th anniversary of the act of 1807, we mark a historic milestone in the ongoing struggle against racism and racial discrimination. We celebrate the heroes of that struggle, past and present. We are, at the same time, reminded in 2007 about the need for vigilance against contemporary racism, modern-day slavery, racial and religious discrimination, and hate crimes such as anti-Semitism.

The inspiring example of our great parliamentary colleague William Wilberforce continues to light the way. I would like to close my remarks with this prayer taken from the Anglican service in his honour:

"Let your continual mercy, O Lord, kindle in your church the never-failing gift of love that, following the

example of your servant William Wilberforce, we may have grace to defend the poor and maintain the cause of those who have no help."

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South-Weston): As the member for a riding where more than one third of my constituents are of African decent, I am indeed honoured to be able to stand today on behalf of my leader, Howard Hampton, and my party to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade and offer our party's support for this motion.

Over the course of four centuries, over 50 million Africans were torn from their homes and sold into slavery. They were transported across the Atlantic Ocean in fetid ships, many of them dying en route, to work on plantations, on farms and in homes.

For many Canadians of African descent, the legacy of the slave trade is a hard one to come to grips with. In a powerful series of articles this week and last, the Toronto Star's Royson James has been writing about his trip to Ghana with other Torontonians to visit the sites of the slave trade, including the infamous Cape Coast Castle, a major embarkation point for recently captured slaves.

Royson James talks about the search for identity that these descendants of slaves are involved in, the attempt to reconnect with their past and their difficulties in dealing with the cruelties that their ancestors faced. While faced with these difficulties, however, his fellow travellers are able to gain new strength from the legacy of their ancestors and to reflect with pride on the fact that their forefathers went on to fight for their freedom in some cases, in other cases to risk their lives to flee slavery and in all cases to build a proud black community in the Americas.

1420

I want to quote a rather powerful message, a passage from one of Mr. James' columns:

"As night fell during the four-hour bus journey to Kumasi, all is quiet reflection. This is a journey into Ashanti land, a trip that would have taken the captured Africans weeks and months to traverse by foot, chained together by the neck and ankle in a terrified and wretched coffle.

"We cross a bridge over the Assin Praso river.

"This is where the slaves would get their last bath before arriving at the dungeons, the guide says.

"And after that, the damnable journey across the Atlantic to America, the Caribbean, Canada and the new world.

"Their descendants have returned. The return trip is not pretty, but it is oh so much more tolerable than the exit."

Ontario has been blessed by the many contributions of former slaves who came from the United States as Loyalists after the American Revolution. Our community was immeasurably strengthened by the addition of the numerous people who bravely escaped and made their way to Canada during the 19th century. And Ontario has been the lucky destination of thousands of members of the Afro-Caribbean community who have immigrated more

recently, including thousands into my riding of York South–Weston.

It is this legacy of strength, of resistance and of determination that characterizes the community made up of descendants of those enslaved. The slave trade was one of the great crimes of history, but its descendants transformed that legacy from a negative to a positive one. Rather than reflect on the wrongs of slavery, Ontarians of African descent have chosen to embrace their heritage and take pride in their accomplishments. There are some very ambitious plans led by the Ontario Black History Society for an African-Canadian cultural centre, an institution which would serve as a very powerful beacon to the community. We in the NDP take pride in the accomplishments of Ontarians of African descent, and we will continue to embrace their legacy.

The Speaker: Mr. Colle has moved a motion regarding the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): My question is to the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, your Minister of Health today published a letter in the National Post that says your decision to keep people waiting needlessly on waiting lists for new knees is based on sound business principles. But the front page of the Globe and Mail has a story that says that the plan put forward by Don Mills Surgical Centre would see knee replacements performed for \$1,082 less each. It's a 15% savings for what it would cost to do the same thing in a community hospital. Acting Premier, how can you see that a decision to keep people waiting for up to two years for surgery performed at a higher cost meets with sound business principles?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's always good to hear from people from the Conservative Party on the matter of health care given that, to this date, coming reasonably close to an election, we've got but two pieces of policy from them related to health care. The first is a \$2.5-billion cut and the second is a very, very generous commitment to move forward with privatization.

It is refreshing, now that spring has sprung, to see that the Conservative policy is being rolled out, and it is indeed no surprise that their policies on health care continue to be influenced by their real leader, Mike Harris.

Mr. Hudak: I say back to the minister who did everything possible to avoid a very simple question, your own assistant deputy minister at the Ministry of Health, Hugh MacLeod, described the Don Mills Surgical Centre's proposal as "relevant, particularly in light of ample evidence pointing to a very significant growth in demand for hip and knee joint replacements."

Minister, you know that if you accept this proposal, some 1,500 Ontarians currently forced to wait in pain for an average of 307 days in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, upwards of 500 days in many communities, could get this surgery in a hospital that's paid for by OHIP—no line-jumping, no paying out of pocket. And here's the bonus: That \$1.6 million in savings could be reinvested in an additional 276 knee replacements. Again I ask the minister: Where is the business case against this model?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It's interesting that for all the dedication that the Conservative Party is prepared to offer about privatization, there's not one word of dedication to the important point, which is that wait times are significantly down in Ontario for a variety of procedures and for knees, which is the matter at hand. In fact, it's passing strange that this honourable member, who sat in cabinet and accordingly sat on his hands while the wait times for this very procedure increased, is now here standing on his feet with his only health care proposal: cut \$2.5 billion and move forward with an agenda of privatization.

We stand alongside those in the public health care system who have worked vigorously to identify new models and new ways of doing business that are producing results for Ontarians. We can measure wait times. We know that wait times for knees are down and we know, through continuing investments in the public health care system, that we will continue to improve on the results and produce better capabilities in the public health care system for the patients of Ontario.

Mr. Hudak: I know that this concept may seem revolutionary in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. The minister knows for a fact that these types of procedures are done in Manitoba, they're done in Alberta and they're done in British Columbia. It's commonplace under the public payment system. Here's the difference, Minister: More grandparents could then attend their grandkids' hockey games or soccer matches, and maybe more people could enjoy simple pleasures like gardening or a walk in the park.

You face a choice. You can help 1,500 patients get surgery quicker or you can make them wait even longer. I remind the minister that it's up to 700 days in communities like Kingston. Why do you choose to make them wait? Why are you playing politics with this issue behind feigned indignation? Why do you make all these people wait?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I ask the honourable member why it was that during the period from 2001 until 2003, wait times for hips and knees in the province of Ontario increased by 21% on that honourable member's watch. Why was it okay, for eight and a half years, for that party, masquerading as a government, to sit on their hands or go for the walk in the park that he spoke about and ignore the plight and circumstances for Ontarians who were waiting too long?

We've increased access to hips and knees by 22,000 procedures. We have reduced the wait times for knees by 30.2% through the dedicated efforts of nurses and doctors

and administrators out there on the front lines. We've produced results in the context of our public health care system. We believe fundamentally that this is the way to go forward: to continue to reward the public health care system for the innovations that it's making and for the improved access that is being provided to the people of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Hudak: Back to the minister: Minister, there seems to be a contradiction in your comments. And Lord knows, Dalton McGuinty saying one thing and doing the opposite is a rare occasion in the province of Ontario; it's a weekly occurrence. Minister, you know full well here again that the Don Mills Surgical Centre performs cataract surgery paid by the OHIP card, and it has been doing so for years. You know full well that the Don Mills Surgical Centre performs arthroscopic procedures paid for by the OHIP card. If it's okay for cataracts and it's okay for arthroscopic procedures, why is it not okay for knee replacements?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: What we know full well is that under that party's watch, wait times in the province of Ontario were rising and they didn't even invest one penny, one iota of interest in addressing that circumstance for the people of Ontario. Our Premier has been dedicated to the challenge of reducing wait times for the people of Ontario. And wait times are down, through the work that has been done on the front line by doctors and nurses, the very people that they are prepared to run away from. Instead, we say, "Thank you for the work that you've done." We continue to believe fundamentally that advances in the public health care system, innovations like the one that we offered at the Scarborough Grace Hospital recently, are the answer to providing more timely access to Ontarians to these key services. Under their watch, they were on the rise, and on our watch wait times for knee surgery are down by 30.2%.

1430

Mr. Hudak: The minister continues to ignore the fact that 1,500 patients in the province of Ontario, some of whom are waiting between 600 and 700 days for knee surgery, continue to wait while the minister is in full bluster here in question period.

The minister has drawn what looks like an ideological line in the sand, except he allows it for cataract surgeries, he allows it for arthroscopic procedures, but the minister won't allow it for knee replacement surgery.

Again, 1,500 individuals who could enjoy seeing their grandkids' soccer games, who could better enjoy life, are suffering on long waiting lists because you refuse to move ahead with this proposal to reduce the waiting lists and save money within the public health system. Minister, explain the contradiction and please tell me that you're wrong.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It should come as no surprise, I suppose, from a party that sat on their hands for eight and a half years while these wait times were on the rise. Now they hear from one of their Tory fund-

raising buddies, prominent in this organization, giving them lots of dough, sending unsolicited proposals forward, and now this becomes the lead question in question period.

Why is it that Mr. Tory, a couple of years into his term as the leader of the party, is yet unable to find any health care policy but two that he has borrowed from his good friend and real leader, Mike Harris: number one, cut \$2.5 billion out of health care; number two, privatize it? Where have we seen that? Where have we heard it? We heard it from them. We're not going that way. We believe in public health care. We thank the doctors and the nurses for the work they have done, and we know that if we continue to work with them and continue to invest, wait times will continue to go down.

Mr. Hudak: I didn't know about Hugh MacLeod's—your assistant deputy minister—political connections, Minister, but I think you know that your own ADM described this proposal as "relevant, particularly in light of ample evidence pointing to a very significant growth in demand for hip and knee replacements."

Thousands of people are languishing on waiting lists in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario that are 125 days longer than he said was proper. You know and I know and our colleagues in the border areas, like the minister beside you, know that on a regular basis people are going across the border, out of Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, to get these procedures.

You, for what appear to be ideological reasons, or maybe political reasons—maybe they've got to give more money to the Liberal Party; I don't know. But 500, 600, 700 days on wait lists for knee replacement surgeries: If you got 1,500 done, you could save \$1.6 million and reinvest that into the system; 1,700 people could come off of those waiting lists right away. Minister, it's the right thing to do. Why don't you act?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Why is it that when provided with an opportunity, this honourable member will not stand in his place and talk about the way that his party has been influenced by a very significant financial contributor? Why is it that the Conservative Party has, today in the Legislature, taken up as their most prominent issue an issue that has been motivated and brought to the fore by someone who's a significant financial contributor in their party? It is passing fancy and strange that this close to an election, the Conservative leader continues to be a façade. He's got no platform but two on health care—reduce health care spending by \$2.5 billion; privatize it—under the influence of contributors to the Conservative Party.

This is not our interest. We believe in the work of the nurses and the doctors on the front line. Our investments will continue to be in the public health care system.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Deputy Premier: Which do you think is more important—that a person working full-time gets paid

enough to lift themselves out of poverty, or that the Premier give himself a \$40,000-a-year pay increase?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question. Indeed, some of us had the opportunity to witness the honourable member's attempts on Citytv over the lunch hour to explain his policies away. He fell flat, especially when he was asked to try to explain his policies away in the face of those who asked him questions from the relevant side of the responsibilities for economic activity. When a small business person posed to this person a question, he blanched, he curled his forehead and he had no answer for the circumstances that were posed.

We campaigned very specifically on an increase to the minimum wage, and we have delivered specifically on those commitments. Our Premier has been clear to say it is not a matter of if, only when, in terms of what the rollout will be towards a \$10 minimum wage and that that goes beyond. But I say to the honourable member: We are a party that has delivered on the specific commitments that we have made. We're proud to have been able to do so. On supplementary, we'll ask him about some of the measures for people on low income that he chose to vote against.

Mr. Hampton: I can only take from that that the McGuinty government thinks that immediate pay increases for themselves come far and above a living wage for minimum wage workers. Your latest effort to promise an increase in the minimum wage sometime in the future still doesn't do it. Not only will this latest McGuinty government scheme leave low-paid workers struggling in poverty, but you expect people to believe another McGuinty election promise.

My question is this: Deputy Premier, can you explain why the Premier can raise his own pay by \$40,000 a year immediately but struggling low-paid workers have to continue to live in poverty for another three years before they get a pay increase?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It's pretty rich when millionaires' row can't even fess up to the fact that they took every penny of the same pay increase that they like to bring to the floor of this Legislature. It's passing rich that this front row that failed the people of the province of Ontario on their commitment around public auto insurance likes to brag on about how great they are, while hoping that we all forget about the fact that they served in government. But at the heart of the matter—and look at the talent that he was working with. I mean, come on.

What we have here is a matter of a government delivering firmly four-square on the commitments that we made to the people of the province: four increases, the most recent one on February 1. Why do they oppose direct grants to lowest-income students in the province of Ontario? Why are they against grants for low-income students?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Health Promotion will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The Minister of Northern Development will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I can wait.

Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: This is about the 1.2 million low-paid workers this province who live below the poverty line. The McGuinty government is asking them to trust Dalton McGuinty once again. These people trusted Dalton McGuinty four years ago when Dalton McGuinty said he was going to freeze hydro rates. He broke that promise. They trusted Dalton McGuinty when he said he was going to rein in the cost of college and university education. He broke that promise. They trusted Dalton McGuinty when he promised that he was going to help autistic children and their parents rather than fight them. He broke that promise.

About the only promise the Premier didn't make was a promise to increase his own pay by \$40,000 a year, but he did that overnight. Why, I say to all the members of the McGuinty government, should the lowest-paid workers in this province, who are living in poverty, now have to wait another three years and place their trust in another all-too-often Dalton McGuinty government election promise?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Now the honourable member has concluded that the wait will be three years, but he forgets that the most recent increase was on February 1 this year, part of a pattern of steady increases, 17% over four years. This honourable member and his party claiming—millionaires' row, millionaires' row—all of them took the pay increase. A couple of them said that they were going to offer receipts. No public transparency about it, nothing except the bluster from the honourable member who has grabbed the dough—he has got it all and he's spending it on whatever he wants.

1440

Why did they vote against 15,000 child care spaces? Why did they vote against direct grants, the same grants that they cut for our lowest-income students? Why are they against insulin pumps for our kids? Why has this party voted against increasing rates for social assistance and doubling support for children with autism? They make a lot of noise now, but the reality is clear. We made commitments around the minimum wage. We—

The Speaker: Thank you.

New question.

Mr. Hampton: Deputy Premier, here is the McGuinty government's record: a \$40,000 pay increase for the Premier and 25 cents for the lowest-paid workers in this province. And who are those 1.2 million workers? Most of them are women. Many of them are new Canadians struggling, working two and three minimum-wage jobs, trying to make ends meet. And now you're telling them to continue living in poverty for another three years and

to place their trust once again in Dalton McGuinty, the penultimate promise-breaker. I say again to all the members of the McGuinty government: How do you justify telling the lowest-paid workers in this province to continue living in poverty for the next three years after the Premier just gave himself a \$40,000-a-year pay increase?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member keeps forgetting that the pay increase—which he has happily, gladly received and signed on to—in proportion, is identical to that of every other member of the Legislature. And indeed, why is it that this member, the leader of millionaires' row, is unwilling, unprepared to stand in his place and indicate on a case-by-case basis what all of those members of the NDP have done with their exactly identical proportional increase in the salary? Show us the receipts. Show us. No transparency at all.

On the matter of the minimum wage, we campaigned on a commitment and we fulfilled that commitment. We agree that the minimum wage must continue to move forward, consistent with the pattern that we've established: steady and ongoing increases. But there is more for the people in Ontario than simply the minimum wage. I ask the honourable member one more time: Why did you vote against direct grants for the most vulnerable and low-income students in the province of Ontario? Why—

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: The Deputy Premier in the McGuinty government obviously doesn't want to address this issue. Here is the reality: Your latest scheme for the minimum wage: not only does it involve people having to trust the penultimate promise-breaker, Dalton McGuinty, again, but you literally condemn them to continue to live in poverty for the next three years.

You had no problem handing over \$5 million to your pal Tom Parkinson. The Premier had no problem taking his former Bay Street fundraiser Jan Carr and paying him \$700,000 a year. The Premier had no problem raising his own pay by \$40,000 a year like that. But when it comes to the lowest-paid workers in the province, the McGuinty government says: "You continue to live in poverty. You continue to struggle in poverty. And maybe, just maybe, if Dalton McGuinty happens to keep this election promise, just maybe you might get a pay increase to \$10 an hour in 2010"—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: How is it that the honourable member continues to justify a circumstance where he rails on about a raise that he has gladly, gleefully accepted? The honourable member, right there in the legislation, had the opportunity to opt out and he didn't. Why won't he turn to the member behind him and ask the member behind him, "What have you done with the exact same proportionate raise that all other members of the Legislature have received? How have you dealt with that in your own riding?"

The reality for this honourable member—the leader of millionaires' row—is that he has more dough than anybody else from around this joint and he's unwilling to say it. But I want to know: Why did that honourable

member and his party refuse to support a return to direct grants for the lowest-income students in Ontario? You cut them as a government. We brought them back. One hundred and twenty thousand people, one in four post-secondary students in Ontario, are again receiving direct grants from the government because access to post-secondary—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: There goes the Deputy Premier again, complaining about his Liberal friend Rosedale Bob Rae. Deputy Premier, this is about working families. Working families need and deserve a minimum wage increase today and a minimum wage that is a living wage.

Interjections.

The Speaker: This should come as no surprise, but I'm having great difficulty hearing the leader of the third party place his question. There is a level of noise from all benches that we just do not need. Order.

Mr. Hampton: Deputy Premier, all those 1.2 million workers who work for the minimum wage need an opportunity to get out of poverty. Instead, what they're getting is a postdated election promise from a chronic promise-breaker. These are people who trusted Dalton McGuinty four years ago when he said that he was going to deal with child care spaces. They're still waiting for child care spaces. Many of these people are still languishing on waiting lists for affordable housing. Many of them are still losing money to your clawback of the national child benefit supplement and many of them are still being denied assistance for their children struggling with autism. How can the McGuinty government honestly tell these workers who work hard every day to trust another Dalton McGuinty election promise when the end of the process will still leave them struggling in poverty?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member, through six questions now, couldn't even raise one issue where he actually kept his word. This is the honourable member who stands here every day and makes pretend-talk with the people of Ontario and won't even fess up to the fact that, alongside every other member of his caucus, he opted into the very same circumstances related to compensation as everybody else. Why won't he just simply turn to the camera and, in an honest way, say, "I got the pay raise"? Why won't he do that? Why won't the leader from millionaires' row fess up? And why won't he acknowledge that the opportunity that is there for people to move out of poverty very often includes post-secondary education? How is it that 327,000 net new jobs have been created through resisting the temptation to do what they did and instead investing in post-secondary education and providing 120,000 people in Ontario of low income with direct grants for post-secondary education that he cut and that he now opposes?

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the Minister of Transportation: Minister, Rob and Lisa Manchester were killed on May 27, leaving their 7-year-old, Katie, an

orphan. That was a result of street racing. On June 7 I tabled Bill 122, which would empower front-line police officers to deal with street racing and it would outlaw aftermarket fuel systems. You refused to do anything about that bill. Four months later, 21-year-old Matthew Powers was brutally killed, the result of street racing. His mother was here at Queen's Park two weeks ago. To preempt that, you announced at that time that you were going to do something about street racing. We have seen nothing.

I would ask you today: Will you bring Bill 122 forward? We have the commitment from the third party that we will deal with it expeditiously. Let's not let another session go by without dealing with this important issue.

1450

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'm pleased to respond to the member. As I indicated last year, in November, when you participated in a forum on street racing at my invitation, along with a significant number of other people, when we were looking at what the components would be from all the people impacted and affected by that type of legislation, we then determined we would sit down and talk to the victims and their families, which we did. Then we went out and started talking to the RCMP and the OPP about their programs. We looked at prevention. We spoke to aftermarket. So we took a far more comprehensive approach than was currently being proposed. So there's no question that in the next couple of weeks or in a few weeks we'll be bringing something forward far more comprehensive than what had been proposed.

We were able to sit down and talk to the people themselves—not only those who are impacted but about the whole issue around prevention. Prevention is absolutely paramount as well, in terms of being—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Klees: Prevention is exactly what Bill 122 is all about. You know full well that Bill 122 was a government bill, totally vetted by Ministry of Transportation staff, your legal staff, and it was totally committed to prevention.

Yes, I was there in November. We've heard nothing from your ministry since November. Talking is not enough when we deal with this issue. Lives are being lost. There were deaths subsequently. I'm asking you today—let's at least get Bill 122 empowered so that we can do something and ensure that we don't go through another session of this place without dealing with this issue.

We'll support a bill brought forward by the government eventually—eventually. I want you now to support a bill that specifically deals with street racing. Will you agree to work with the third party and with the official opposition to deal with Bill 122 expeditiously so that we can get it on the books—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I'm pleased to respond. You have an interesting definition of "expeditiously," since you were in government for eight years and did nothing, absolutely nothing, on street racing.

This isn't new. It isn't something that just happened overnight. It impacts and affects families right across this province. We now need to work very closely with what the federal government has put in place, what we can put in place and what we can do in terms of prevention. For example, the Ontario Provincial Police have a program called ERASE. We would like to work with them to encourage young people to find an alternative in terms of street racing. Actually, you can ask Mr. Baird about it because he participated in it as well. We had a wonderful time in Milton looking at alternatives.

Interjections.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Prevention is just as important—sorry, it was Mr. Chudleigh—as the punitive part of it.

You had your chance. You blew it. We're fixing it. You're too late. We're going to put in place something far more comprehensive than what you propose. You're playing politics. Absolutely. You are the people who had eight years to do something, and you did nothing—absolutely nothing.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Shelley Thorpe and Nicole Saddler, two Hamilton moms with autistic children, are in the gallery today. They want to know why your government has discriminated against their families when it comes to paying their IBI therapists. In January, your government increased the hourly rate provided to families who pay their IBI therapists directly, but this increase doesn't apply to families who were already receiving IBI. That will happen only if and when their contracts for IBI are renewed: in July, for Nicole; and in October, for Shelley. Until then, they'll get less money to pay their therapists than families who are just starting IBI treatment now. Minister, how do you justify that discrimination?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm happy to have the opportunity to respond to this question from the member for Nickel Belt, who I acknowledge has been a very consistent and strong advocate for families and children with autism. But the member knows, because my office received an inquiry from her office this week, and my office informed her that in fact the DFO rate is being increased retroactive to January, when I introduced the new funding. So all recipients of DFO services will receive the new rate.

Ms. Martel: Her office didn't tell us that at all in response to our inquiry.

Your office said that some announcement would be made in the future. There was absolutely no commitment made to us, either with respect to Shelley or with respect

to Nicole, nor has the Hamilton regional provider, whom they've been dealing with, informed them of that change either.

I ask you again, Minister, because the discrimination is clear: When will that change, and will it be retroactive so these families will not be out of pocket any longer?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I know this is good news, and I know it's very hard for the member to accept good news, but you're hearing it from me. You're hearing it in the presence of several witnesses. That is my commitment. These parents will all be receiving the updated rate, and I'm sure that you're pleased that I have been revising all to do with the autism program, including the rates of DFO.

MINISTRY OF REVENUE

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): My question is for the Minister of Revenue.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We really do need it to be a little bit more under control in here.

Ms. Matthews: Minister, first of all, I'd like to congratulate you on your resounding election victory and welcome you to this Legislature. I'm sure you will find this to be a very interesting, challenging and rewarding chapter in your life. We're glad to have you here.

Minister, I understand you've had a busy few weeks since becoming an MPP and minister. I wonder if you could share with this House—I'm sure they're anxious to hear, as you can tell—what specific things you've been doing in the short time since you've become minister.

Hon. Michael Chan (Minister of Revenue): Someone just woke me up.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Chan: I would like to thank the member for London North Centre for her question. As I just repeat: She kind of woke me up.

This is the first time I speak to the House. I want to thank the people in Markham for choosing me as their MPP. I also want to express my gratefulness to our Premier, Dalton McGuinty, for choosing me as Minister of Revenue.

Within the first few days since I was appointed, I had the liberty to visit the head office of the Ministry of Revenue. Since then, I have visited the branches in Hamilton, North York and also in Mississauga. What I found out is that I have 28 dedicated and professional staff, and I'm very grateful for that.

This ministry is very important in this government because it collects revenue to fund important programs such as health care, education, infrastructure and other programs.

Ms. Matthews: Minister, I'm sure that when the Premier asked you to be minister, he told you, of course, that since you're the minister who collects all the taxes, you would be the most popular minister in the province. I'm sure that was part of the briefing.

I'd like to ask you about your priorities as you go forward. What are the most urgent priorities for you as Minister of Revenue?

Interjection.

1500

Hon. Mr. Chan: It's a very important ministry collecting revenue, including collecting the opposite member's salary too.

This ministry collects 43% of the total revenue of Ontario, which is equivalent to about \$37 billion.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Chan: That's a lot of money. You can say that again.

One of my priorities is to oversee the harmonization of the corporate tax. As you know, by 2009, the federal government will be responsible to collect those taxes. At the moment, I am overseeing the procedure, making sure it runs smoothly. Another priority is to look at the improvement of technology so that the collection of taxes can be streamlined, easier for the people, and to make it easier for them to voluntarily comply with taxes. I am—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Joyce Savoline (Burlington): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital renewal plan has been with your ministry for nearly four years, which is the entire time that you've been in power. Officials at Joseph Brant hospital couldn't even get a meeting with your staff or you until I publicly and repetitively raised this issue during the by-election. And I suppose by coincidence the hospital officials received notice from your ministry that there would be a meeting, which occurred at the end of February, and one day after I was sworn in, you finally announced design funding.

Is this just hush money, Minister, to keep me quiet, or will you stand in your place and confirm for me and the proud people of Burlington that you will include the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital renewal in your ministry's list of priority hospital projects?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): First off, I want to offer a very warm welcome to the Legislature. We all enjoy the privilege of representing our constituents and we all seek to do it well, and I want to welcome you very sincerely.

If we're very, very direct about it, we'll recognize that, while we have been in office for three and a half years, the party that preceded us for eight and a half left behind some pretty substantial challenges. Hilary Short from the Ontario Hospital Association has indicated those challenges with respect to hospital capital construction at something in the neighbourhood of \$8 to \$10 billion. Through the leadership of the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, we're very, very proud that, through our five-year plan, our government is investing more

resources in new hospital construction and renewal than the last five governments in Ontario combined.

To date, it's true that there is more work to do at Joe Brant, but even in the existing envelope they've worked through a reduction in wait times. They've enhanced their productivity. We're proud of the work that we've done, but we acknowledge that there is room to enhance the capability of the facilities. That is why we recently provided them with \$1.5 million to do the important design work that is necessary before we can move to the next stage.

Mrs. Savoline: I'll take that as a no, and you can be sure, Minister, that I will immediately communicate your pathetic response to the good people of Burlington. The track record of your government's dithering has tied the hands of dedicated volunteers who are ready to start raising \$20 million, half the cost of the project.

During the by-election, on your candidate's website, it stated, and I quote: "She can immediately start working from within government to get more beds and better services for Joseph Brant. As a Liberal MPP, she can deliver." I would hope that when you're dealing with critical issues and priority-setting in ridings that are not held by your party, you would park your politics at the door and treat all Ontarians, regardless of which MPP represents the riding, with respect and the attention that you give to Liberal ridings.

You didn't answer my question, Minister, so I ask you again: Will you stand in your place and confirm for me and the proud people of Burlington that you will include JBMH renewal in your ministry's list of priority hospital projects?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Before the honourable member concludes that the answer was pathetic, which she had to read, maybe she should lean to her right—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Maybe she should lean to the gentleman to her right and ask him how the regional cancer centre is coming along in his community. Talk to the member from Woodstock about how the circumstances are proceeding with the new hospital there; ask the member from Oak Ridges how the expansion of York Central Hospital is coming. Before the honourable member suggests that there is politics being played, she should know a little about all the hospital capital redevelopment that's going on amongst colleague ridings. Your party has a \$2.5-billion cut to health care on the table. Why don't you try and figure out how that's going to be helpful to Joe Brant?

PAPER MILL

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Deputy Premier: Three years ago, forestry industry representatives told the McGuinty government that your scheme to drive industrial hydro rates through the roof would close literally dozens of mills and destroy thousands of jobs in the forest sector. You refused to listen, and so three years later that's what has happened. But

yesterday the court ordered the wind-down of operations at St. Marys Paper in Sault Ste. Marie. What's interesting is that the Liberal MPP for Sault Ste. Marie responded by telling the St. Marys Paper workers that they must take a 20% pay cut for the next seven years and make a litany of concessions on their pensions for the mill to stay open.

My question is this: Is this the McGuinty government plan for the forest sector in northern Ontario: Drive industrial hydro rates through the roof, force paper mills to the financial edge and then tell the workers it's their fault and that they should take pension cuts and pay cuts to make up for the wrong-headed policies of the McGuinty government?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): Over the last three months we've been working with the union. I've met with the union representatives of St. Marys Paper and with management there. We have been assisting on a daily basis with the negotiations that have occurred between management and the union. We have offered the company, in order to form a sound basis for an organized restructuring of the company, all sorts of assistance to make that happen. In the end, it looks like there is going to be an orderly wind-down through a court order. We certainly hope that, since this has failed, there's still going to be paper production in St. Marys under a new company, but we worked very hard to make sure and tried very hard to get a seamless transition into a new company so that paper production and all those jobs could go on in Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Hampton: This is like listening to the minister responsible for shutting down northern Ontario. The workers there know that it was literally the doubling of the hydro bill for that mill that pushed the mill to the financial edge. Who sets hydro rates in Ontario? The McGuinty government. Who says that these mills, many of which are located near power dams where electricity is produced for one cent a kilowatt hour, have to pay seven cents a kilowatt hour? The McGuinty government. Minister, don't you feel a little shame? Don't you feel a little bit of guilt after pushing mills like St. Marys to the financial edge? Don't you feel a little guilt now, saying to the workers, "It's your fault. You take a 20% pay cut for seven years. You take a cut in the pension. You give up some of your job security"? Is this the McGuinty government's prosperity plan for northern Ontario: Push mills to the brink, then blame it on the workers and tell them to take a pay cut? Is that the McGuinty government plan?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: What brought St. Marys Paper to the financial brink was an outstanding pension liability that their banker, the Bank of America, said was unsustainable, so the banker and the company agreed to go into bankruptcy protection so that they could organize this and look for and try to negotiate an orderly restructuring of the company. As you know, the workers own

20% of St. Marys Paper and they're partners in this too. We worked very hard with them and with management, and it looked in the end like we weren't able to do it. We hope in the end that, after this is over, in the next stage there is a new company there and we're again making paper in Sault Ste. Marie.

1510

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I'm extremely proud of our government's accomplishments on behalf of the province's agriculture and food sector. Recently you had the chance to visit the great riding of Peterborough and meet with local farmers to allow them the opportunity to discuss our government's agricultural programs. It was a very productive meeting, and the farmers really appreciated an opportunity to meet with you over a couple of hours.

Minister, how has our government helped farmers since taking office in the fall of 2003?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): First of all, I very much appreciate any and every opportunity I have to sit down and speak with farmers and certainly the member from Peterborough. The meeting I had that day—very clearly, he is a good friend to farmers in his community.

With respect to what this government has done since we came to office, since 2003 we have invested \$910 million in new money over and above what we spent at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I will say, in the year 2006 alone, in addition to the \$17 million more that my ministry received at the time of the budget, last March we also announced an additional \$125 million for farmers. They indicated that they were going to have difficulty, many of them, buying the seed and the fertilizer for their crops. Our government assisted them in that way, along with the federal government. In the fall of last year, at the plowing match in Peterborough county, our Premier announced an additional \$110 million. This \$110 million was in partnership with the federal government, which had provided some additional resources as well.

I will say to the honourable members of this Legislature that Ontario is the only province in Canada to match those federal dollars. I know it was very—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Leal: Thank you, Minister, and the farmers that day acknowledged your leadership and the leadership of your predecessor, the now Minister of Labour.

In stark contrast, the previous Conservative government had a record of neglect and mismanagement when it came to rural Ontario, especially in my riding of Peterborough. They closed the local ag office in my riding and many others across Ontario. Under Mr. Tory's party, they abandoned rural Ontario and turned their

backs on the farmers. Now they have an unholy alliance with the landowners.

Minister, can you please explain to this House the devastating effect that the previous Conservative government had on rural Ontario?

Laughter.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: It's interesting that members of the opposition side laugh at this question, but I can say that farmers across Ontario certainly didn't laugh when it happened and they're not laughing now. But they will remember. They will remember what the Conservatives did to rural Ontario for those eight years, those eight years of terror.

The previous government cut \$80 million from the Ministry of Agriculture budget. They shut down 41 offices of OMAFRA. They didn't just shut them down; they got out of town. They sold the real estate—

Interjections.

The Speaker: We only have 11 minutes left. Let's try to be calm and under control.

The Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: They got out of town. They sold the real estate. They left communities like Brockville, like Carleton Place, like Lanark, like Perth, like Nepean, like Muskoka, like Walkerton, like Orangeville, like Georgetown, like Chatham, Essex, St. Thomas, Clarksburg, Sault Ste. Marie. Those communities are still stinging from the neglect of the previous government. We will not abandon rural Ontario. Our government has invested and we will continue to be there for farmers in rural communities.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last September, you received an urgent appeal from Greg Lubimiv, the executive director of the Phoenix Centre for Children and Families in my riding, co-signed by Lieutenant Colonel Dave Rundle, the base commander of CFB Petawawa, looking for immediate special funding to deal with the burgeoning increase in the need for mental health services for children in and around the Petawawa base area as a result of the deployment in Afghanistan and the tremendous stress that was placing on families in that area.

Minister, you turned them down flat, citing your reasoning that it's the responsibility of the federal government to provide those services to families of the military. Subsequent communications from Greg Lubimiv indicated that you were wrong. The Ombudsman is now involved in this. You are wrong.

Why do you continue to victimize children in Renfrew county and around base Petawawa by denying this very, very important funding?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The Phoenix Centre in Renfrew county receives just short of \$1.8 million per

year, and with that has been serving approximately 1,400 kids with mental health challenges each year. In fact, they received some of the increase in funding that our government announced after we were elected, following 12 years of frozen funding for the children's mental health sector. That sector now is funded to the tune of \$467.5 million, which represents a \$38-million increase that they have received from our government.

There is more to be done in the children's mental health sector, but we have come a long way from the 12 years of frozen funding.

Mr. Yakabuski: It would appear that the minister does accept that it is a provincial responsibility to fund those programs, and that's a good admission by omission on your part, Minister.

The question is, why do you continue to victimize children? These are extraordinary circumstances in extraordinary times. This is not about playing games with Ottawa or looking to the past. This is an issue of real significance today. As a result of those military deployments, the mental health needs of children and families in Renfrew county are burgeoning under your watch, and you sit back and get into a tug-of-war with the federal government.

Will you commit to this House today, before the Ombudsman actually compels you to do so, to fund those very important programs and not let any more children fall between the cracks on your watch?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: While the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has been blowing hot air on this subject, I have actually made the observation that these children of military men and women are in fact experiencing a heightened incidence of stress because of the military effort in Afghanistan, and that centre, which was totally under control until December 2005, specifically associated their increase in referrals and caseloads with that effort. So I'm very pleased that the federal government has heard my plea on behalf of those families and, according to the budget that was delivered on Monday, will be establishing centres to provide services for military families around this country. I'm surprised the member doesn't know that.

I actually am very, very grateful for what the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. New question.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Madam Minister, yesterday I asked you what I thought was a very simple question. I asked you why your government was punishing the Patterson family and pushing them deeper into poverty by clawing back orphan benefits for two needy children, one who has a brain tumour and the other who has a diagnosed mental illness.

Just by way of background, Revenue Canada states that an orphan's benefit belongs to the child, not to the guardian who receives it. But you say that you need these children's money more than, obviously, they do, so you're clawing it back.

Please just answer the question: Will you do the right and honourable thing and reinstate the Patterson family's Ontario Works benefit and let the orphaned, sick children keep their own money?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for franco-phone affairs): I thank the member from Beaches-East York for his question. As the member knows, I cannot talk about specific cases.

It's very unfortunate when there are children who are in need, and this government has worked very, very hard to improve the situation of children in Ontario. However, the CPP benefits are treated as income and not earnings. This is not a change. CPP benefits have always been treated as income under social assistance since the introduction of CPP in 1966. As you are aware, Ontario Works is a program of last resort and individuals must pursue all financial resources they or their dependants may be entitled to before they are eligible for social assistance.

1520

Mr. Prue: Madam Minister, again, Revenue Canada says that this money belongs to the children, not to the guardian. If you want to tax these children—and this is the only thing they get. They don't even pay income tax. They don't even pay, but you're taking it off their parent as if it was the parent's money. It is the children's money.

You said that this is a program of last resort. This is the only resort that these poor two little children who are now orphaned from a deceased father have. I don't understand why you're doing this to children. I do not understand it, and I do not understand the statement that you've made. It is the orphans' money, not their guardian's. It is the orphans' money that you are taking. You're punishing the guardian, who in turn will, I guess, have to take the orphans' money off them. That is the effect of what you're doing. Will you do the right thing today in this House and give back the dignity you stole from this family and reinstate those benefits?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: As I said, this has been the practice since 1966, and it's the practice across the country.

But I'm going to ask a question to the member on the other side. When his leader in the front row was sitting in cabinet, they did not do anything to change it. Why? Because that's the practice across the country. When we calculate benefits for someone who needs welfare, all the income of the family unit is taken into consideration.

I would say to the member opposite, we have looked across the country and this is the practice in every province. We still need the answer from Saskatchewan, but the rest of the provinces are having the same practice adopted.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. Minister, population growth is as essential to the vitality of a nation as growth is to an individual. For quite some time, birth rates in Ontario and throughout Canada have not been as high as we would like them to be. While I am from a family of 12 children, it is exceedingly rare to find that today.

Minister, to maintain steady population growth, we need to look towards immigration. What's more, the skilled immigrants who come to this province have to be provided with opportunities to use the skills that they trained for, many of which we face a shortage of in this country and province. Minister, can you tell us what our government is doing to break down barriers for the newcomers to this province?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I would like to thank the member for Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh. He's so right. There's a very obvious challenge. We have a flat birth rate and we have an older and aging workforce, so immigration is the key to keep our workforce stable. In fact, in five years, all our new net growth in the labour force will come from immigration. So it's a reality we face. That's why we have a comprehensive plan to break down barriers for newcomers so they can get jobs, so they can get training; they can be welcomed.

The good news is, because of Bill 124, because of our \$5,000 loan program, because of the \$920 million we are finally getting from the federal government, we're able to really break down barriers for newcomers so they can go to Cornwall, they can go to Kenora and they can go to Toronto and work and contribute to the economy and contribute to the community.

PETITIONS

SMITHS FALLS ECONOMY

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Hershey Canada has announced the closure of its Smiths Falls plant, putting 500 people out of work; and

"Whereas the McGuinty government has announced that it will close the Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls as of 2009, putting another 800 people out of work; and

"Whereas these closures will result in additional job losses at local suppliers to Hershey, such as dairy farms, local tourism operators and all local businesses; and

"Whereas the 9,200 residents of Smiths Falls will be devastated by these 1,300-plus job losses;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the government of Ontario continue to work with Hershey to reverse the decision to close the Smiths Falls plant;

"That the government of Ontario immediately fund infrastructure projects in Smiths Falls like the hospital redevelopment in order to attract new industry;

"That the government of Ontario complete the four-laning of Highway 7 and the reconstruction of Highway 15 at an accelerated pace;

"That the government of Ontario postpone the closure of the Rideau Regional Centre at least until it has replaced the 800 jobs with an equal number of new public sector jobs;

"That the government of Ontario create a fund equivalent to the northern Ontario heritage fund to attract investment to eastern Ontario."

It's my pleasure to sign that petition on behalf of the people of Smiths Falls.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provision in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funds by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

This has been signed by several residents of my constituency, and I affix my signature as well.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep getting petitions from the Consumer Federation of Canada, and it's about the item of identity theft, addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and specifically the Minister of Government Services.

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"We, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers.

"(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

"(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reasons.

"(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate."

Since I agree with this petition, I'm delighted to sign my name to it.

1530

STEVENSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): A petition to reopen the birthing unit at Stevenson Memorial Hospital.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital needs \$1.4 million in new funding over the next three years to get its birthing unit reopened and to ensure that they can recruit enough obstetricians and health care providers to supply a stable and ongoing service for expectant mothers in our area; and

"Whereas forcing expectant mothers to drive to Newmarket, Barrie or Orangeville to give birth is not only unacceptable, it is a potential safety hazard; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital cannot reopen the unit under its current budget and the McGuinty government has been unresponsive to repeated requests for new funding;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately provide the required \$1.4 million in new funding to

Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that the local birthing unit can reopen and so that mothers can give birth in Alliston."

I, of course, agree with that petition, and I have signed it.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have a petition here that was circulated in the Kapuskasing area in regard to gas prices, and it reads as follows:

"We, from the northeastern communities, who live in towns along the Highway 11 corridor from Geraldton to Cochrane, are being ripped off by gasoline companies. Presently we're paying from 20 to 26 cents per litre more than in the southern region, which adds up to about another dollar per litre.

"We are told that transportation costs are a quarter cent per litre to take gasoline from the refiner to the pertinent pumps in these towns. This situation is becoming intolerable. The companies and governments are realizing exorbitant profits, which total into the millions of dollars compared to the south. The cost of living in the north has realized a huge rise in costs on all other commodities because of the price of gas, such as food and other essentials.

"Many are concerned and complain, even our municipal officers, about the unfair treatment which we are getting in northeastern Ontario with regard to gas prices.

"Therefore, be it resolved that the government take action in order to regulate the price of gas, in order to give fairness to citizens of northeastern Ontario."

I affix my signature to that.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up, and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bedroom ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal program and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition as a result of a meeting that you were at last night, as well as Mr. O'Toole and Ms. Elliott, a result of Mr. Paul Taylor, which reads as follows:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I affix my name in full support.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): I also have a petition from the Lakeridge Health Centre.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I agree with this petition and I'm going to affix my signature.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have a petition from some members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

"Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province but have yet to be officially recognized; and

"Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

"Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact Bill 25, an act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I shall affix my signature and send it with Sarah to the Clerk's table.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of Paul Taylor and the Lakeridge community in the riding of Durham and the region of Durham which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8 million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program"—mental health and children's mental health—"at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that you were there last night. I was there, and Christine Elliott and Jerry Ouellette. I know the whole community is supportive of me signing and endorsing this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): I have a petition signed on behalf of long-term-care home residents in the province. Some 35,000 residents who still live in older homes, many in three- and four-bed ward rooms.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding long-term care, and I present it now.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of

care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

“Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

“Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

“Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member’s motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

“Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

I will affix my signature to this, and I trust that the budget tomorrow will contain these provisions.

1540

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ELECTORAL SYSTEM REFERENDUM ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LE RÉFÉRENDUM RELATIF AU SYSTÈME ÉLECTORAL

Bill 155, An Act to provide for a referendum on Ontario’s electoral system / Projet de loi 155, Loi prévoyant un référendum sur le système électoral de l’Ontario.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): It’s a tremendous privilege for me to have a chance to begin third reading debate on this—I’m sorry. It has been a while. I beg leave to introduce Bill 155. I move third reading of Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2006.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Mrs. Bountrogianni has moved third reading of Bill 155.

Madam Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I was finishing up my French homework. I shouldn’t do that here.

It’s a tremendous privilege for me to have a chance today to begin third reading debate on this very important piece of legislation, Bill 155, the Electoral System Referendum Act. I’ll be splitting my time here this afternoon

with the honourable member from Brampton Centre, my parliamentary assistant and colleague Linda Jeffrey.

This is a very important piece of legislation. This bill being debated this evening will ensure that if a referendum is held on electoral reform, we will have a legitimate process in place that will provide Ontarians with a clear outcome. I’m proud to speak to a piece of legislation that so clearly illustrates our government’s belief that the shape of Ontario’s democracy is a matter for Ontarians to decide. This bill speaks to the basics of the democratic renewal agenda, giving greater voice to the people of this province. Our government believes that if a recommendation for an alternative electoral system is made, every citizen in this province should have a chance to make the choice for themselves in a referendum.

Off the bat, I would like to thank all the individuals who came to the public hearings on this bill held here in Toronto and all the individuals who made written submissions. It is always heartening to see Ontarians take an interest in their democratic system.

I’d like to spend some time talking about this piece of legislation and the importance of this legislation to the people of Ontario.

First of all, this legislation does not presume any outcome. We do not know whether any change will be recommended by the citizens’ assembly or what any recommendation might be. This legislation, if passed, would make it possible for Ontarians to determine which electoral system best reflects their values via a referendum to be held at the next provincial election. Our responsibility is to ensure that citizens’ voices are heard loud and clear.

Pour la première fois dans l’histoire de notre province, la population aura l’occasion de participer à un débat ouvert et approfondi sur notre système électoral. C’est une occasion sans précédent pour les Ontariens et les Ontariennes d’aider à renforcer notre démocratie. Jamais un gouvernement ontarien n’a donné aux citoyens ce genre d’occasion de façonner les rouages du gouvernement. C’est un procédé sain et passionnant.

This is historic legislation. A decision to change electoral systems should not be taken lightly. Regular elections allowing citizens to choose who will represent them and govern are the foundation of our democracy. Different electoral systems have different strengths and can have a significant impact on our political landscape. Our government believes that it is the people of Ontario who should decide what values are most important and how they want their government to work.

This legislation will ensure that the wording of the referendum question, if a referendum is required, will be clear, concise and impartial. I also would like to mention that this legislation establishes that the referendum ballot shall be separate from the election ballot.

Before I continue to speak about this bill and, more specifically, the public hearings that we had on this bill, I’d like to take a moment and speak about some of the other ways our government is bringing Ontario’s democracy into the 21st century.

I'd like to start by speaking about 103 Ontarians who, with their chair, George Thomson, have spent every other weekend since September at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University. All members, 52 women and 51 men, one person from each of Ontario's ridings, are combining their unique perspectives, their creativity and their range of experience to the work of the assembly. I'm speaking about the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. These Ontarians accepted the task of learning about our current electoral system and others around the world. They will decide in the weeks ahead whether Ontario should keep or change the electoral system they have inherited. I don't know if any of them knew how exciting this entire process would be.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Exciting? Some of them have resigned.

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: No, they haven't, actually. None have resigned.

Many more wrote in to the assembly and expressed their thoughts on electoral reform via written submissions.

Monsieur le Président, encourager une participation concrète au système démocratique de l'Ontario est le fondement du programme de renouveau démocratique de notre gouvernement. Nous croyons que les gouvernements font les meilleurs choix lorsque les citoyennes et citoyens sont engagés.

That's why we established the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. The assembly is a new form of decision-making that is empowering citizens as never before. No government in this province has ever given citizens this kind of opportunity to shape Ontario's democracy.

The assembly had a chance to hear from Ontarians. This winter, the assembly members led public consultations in their cities and towns across the province. Ontarians exchanged ideas about electoral reform and made their views known to assembly members. I was fortunate to have been able to attend a meeting in Hamilton. Many of the meetings generated a great deal of interest. More than 100 citizens attended the meeting in Toronto. It seems as though this process has engaged citizens throughout the province.

They had the opportunity to hear and now consider the values of Ontarians. In addition, they have been asked to consider a number of values and principles in their deliberations that include voter choice and stable and effective government, some of the fundamentals that underlie democratic systems here and around the world. During their final weeks of deliberation, assembly members are considering everything they have learned. The final report will outline the assembly's recommendation about whether Ontario should keep the current electoral system or adopt a new one. The report will be delivered to the government by May 15, 2007.

If the assembly decides that there should be a change to our current electoral system, a referendum is needed to allow all voting Ontarians the chance to have their say. I stand in the House today to ask my colleagues to support

this very important piece of legislation that would allow a referendum to take place if the citizens' assembly recommends a new electoral system.

The citizens' assembly has invested much time and effort in making its recommendation. The work of the citizens' assembly members is an incredible contribution to Ontario's democratic life. This legislation reflects the significance of this decision as well as the significance of the task we gave to the citizens' assembly.

Our government also invited Ontario's youth to participate in this exciting process. The Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform was a parallel citizens' assembly process for Ontario high school students. It empowered young Ontarians by giving them a say in the electoral reform process in a way that was interactive, youth-focused and inclusive.

Our coordinating partners from the students' assembly created ways for young Ontarians to participate in the debate on electoral reform that are consistent with their values, their lifestyle and their expectations. A weekend assembly meeting was held for 103 high school students this fall. At the same time, classroom assemblies were held in high schools across Ontario. In February, the students' assembly presented its recommendation to the citizens' assembly. The organizers have reported that the students have continued the dialogue on electoral reform informally through e-mails and blogs.

The students kicked off their weekend with a visit to Queen's Park, where they were able to see our Legislature in action during question period. Afterwards, a reception was held, and many of the students' assembly members had a chance to meet with their local MPP. Many more have set up meetings with their local MPP and visited their constituency offices. I'm sure the members of this House equally enjoyed the experience. The enthusiasm generated by the students' exercise has taken on a life of its own. I believe this shows that, contrary to what some might think, young Ontarians are anything but apathetic about government. Our investment in the students' assembly has extended far beyond the organized activities held last year.

I'd like to share some things said by students' assembly members on the process.

One said, "I think it's a testament to the students' assembly's importance that the idea of a students' assembly was so well received. It really is a jumping-off point for the future." I couldn't agree more. Students are our future, and whenever young Ontarians become involved in the political process, I think it's important to acknowledge that participation and applaud them.

Another said, "I was never one for politics, and always thought of voting as my only contribution to the government. I must admit, it's still a bit weird having this opinion changed."

One more I would like to share with you all: A student said, "One of the highlights from those five days was when we visited Queen's Park and were able to witness question period. Although I live in Toronto, it was my

first time actually going inside the building and seeing the heart of Ontario in action.”

1550

I think this last statement says it all: “At the end of the day, this type of citizen engagement represents the heart of Ontario in action.”

Whether the assembly chooses to change our current system or not, the exercise of re-examining our electoral system will reinvigorate and heighten our understanding of our democracy.

Before I talk about the public hearings on this bill, I would like to take a moment to mention some of our other democratic renewal accomplishments. We’ve amended the province’s election laws and set regularly scheduled election dates because we believe that citizens should know when elections will be held. In this way, we have created a level playing field for all candidates. In that legislation we had a flexibility mechanism. If the first Thursday in October, the fixed polling day for general elections, falls on a day of religious or cultural significance, the Chief Election Officer can recommend that polling day be moved to any of the subsequent seven days.

Our government has improved the transparency of our political process by requiring real-time public disclosure of political contributions of \$100 and more to political parties and leadership candidates. That information is now just a mouse click away. We’ve also required that the cabinet ministers attend question period at least two thirds of the time. We’ve banned partisan government advertising. And for the upcoming general election we have preserved 11 northern ridings and increased the number of provincial ridings in the south from 92 to 96. We believe that every region of Ontario is significant and has an important role to play in building a strong and prosperous province. We also believe that in order to do so, every region needs to be represented effectively in the Legislature.

That’s not all, but I would like to move on to the hearings that we had for this bill and share with my colleagues on both sides of this House what we heard and the outcomes of those discussions. Our government wanted to hear what Ontarians had to say about this piece of legislation. That’s why the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly called public hearings. I’d like to thank the members of the standing committee, including the member for Brampton Centre, Linda Jeffrey—my parliamentary assistant—for all their work.

At the hearings, Ontarians from different walks of life expressed a wide range of views on this legislation. We heard from some of our members across the aisle. We also heard from leading stakeholders and engaged citizens. The presentations provided insight into the legislation and the importance of electoral reform for Ontarians. A number of key issues were raised, from representation of women, minorities and youth, to suggestions for a possible public education campaign. We thank all of our presenters for their contribution to this legislative process.

M. le Président, le gouvernement a reçu, par écrit, les points de vue d’un groupe varié de particuliers et d’organismes, dont l’Assemblée des étudiants. Nous remercions les Ontariens et Ontariennes qui ont participé et nous ont fait connaître leurs pensées et leurs idées.

During the public hearings, we heard concerns about what happens to the reports of the referendum campaign organizers in relation to the legislation’s repeal date. There was a call for greater certainty about the length of time records would be retained by Elections Ontario. An amendment has been made to ensure that it is clear that records will remain posted on the Internet for six years after the referendum.

Since I was appointed minister responsible for democratic renewal, I’ve been inspired by how passionate citizens are about their democracy and how committed they are to ensuring it remains strong in the future. The citizens’ assembly consultations, the presenters and authors of the submissions to the standing committee all showed the interest Ontarians have in participating in decisions about their democracy. This is what citizen engagement is all about: It’s about providing opportunities for Ontarians to have meaningful participation in the deliberative and decision-making process. It’s also about facilitating debate and discussion and creating forums for Ontarians to listen to one another.

By passing this legislation, we will be telling Ontarians that their participation in this historic initiative will have a meaningful impact on the government’s decisions. This is democracy in action, a democracy that belongs to the citizens of Ontario, not just their elected officials. If the citizens’ assembly recommends an alternative electoral system, this legislation will give every Ontarian the opportunity to make their voices heard.

Le gouvernement McGuinty continue de jouer un rôle moteur dans le renouveau de notre démocratie. Il est déterminé à faire participer à notre système électoral un nombre accru d’Ontariens et d’Ontariennes. Il met beaucoup d’efforts à combattre le désenchantement politique et à accroître le taux de participation électorale ainsi que l’engagement des citoyens.

This legislation is about providing every citizen of this province the opportunity to make the choice for themselves in a referendum. By participating in a referendum, Ontarians will continue to build a strong, vital democracy for our province.

I’m very proud to support this bill today. I urge the members of this House to join me in support of Bill 155 because our democracy makes us more than just a group of people, more than just a population; it makes us a society.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): As the parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for democratic renewal, I’m delighted to speak today in support of third reading of Bill 155, Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007.

Let me start off by saying that this bill will enable every Ontarian voice to be heard regarding the province’s

electoral system. The independent Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform is now in the final stages of their deliberation. Their task is to recommend whether Ontario should keep the current system or adopt a new one.

As the minister stated earlier, these assembly members have been spending two weekends a month since September studying our current electoral system and others. They also led public consultations in communities across this province. As well, these 103 members were given the opportunity to consult with the former members of the select committee on electoral reform. If the citizens' assembly recommends the need for change to the electoral system, a referendum would take place in conjunction with the next provincial election in October 2007.

With the launch of this citizens' assembly and the hopeful passing of Bill 155, our government is sending a message to the people of this province. We are sending a message that we are listening, and it is the people of Ontario who have the power to shape the future of the electoral system.

The Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007, is proposed to ensure that, should a referendum on electoral reform be necessary, Ontarians have a legitimate and transparent process in place that will lead to a meaningful outcome.

A referendum decision rule sets the level of popular support required for a referendum option to carry. A decision rule may include more than one threshold that must be met. Should the citizens' assembly recommend a new electoral system for Ontarians to vote on, the Electoral System Referendum Act, 2007, proposes two thresholds for the referendum vote to meet, one being 60% of all votes cast province-wide, plus a simple majority of more than 50% of votes cast in at least 64% provincial ridings, the equivalent of 60% or more of provincial ridings.

An undertaking of this magnitude must have solid support from across Ontario. I believe this proposed legislation reflects the significance of this electoral reform and indeed what is meant when we say the word "democracy."

The citizens of Ontario will not be making this decision blindly. If the citizens' assembly recommends an alternative electoral system, we will ensure that Ontarians have access to fair and neutral information they need to make an informed decision on the referendum.

If in the referendum Ontarians vote to change the electoral system, the government would be bound by the results to introduce the alternative system. This proposed legislation would require the government to introduce a bill by December 31, 2008. This bill would support implementing the recommendations of the citizens' assembly.

It's up to Ontarians to decide which electoral system best reflects their values. It is the government's responsibility to guarantee that their voices are heard loud and clear.

This bill promotes our belief in democracy where each citizen has an opportunity to participate in building a better society, and our government takes pride in empowering the citizens we serve.

We heard a variety of recommendations and concerns expressed on the issue of threshold. We heard arguments for a simple majority and those in support of our recommended decision rule. What we must remember is that the adoption of a new electoral system represents a foundational change in Ontario's democracy.

We believe that a decision of this magnitude deserves to have the support of a solid majority of Ontarians across this province. This proposed legislation reflects the significance of this decision. We're requiring solid majority among the Ontario electorate and regions of our province. We believe that the people of Ontario deserve that level of certainty.

1600

I had the opportunity to sit on the committee that heard from numerous Ontarians on this piece of legislation. It was very heartening to hear how passionate Ontarians are about this bill and the issue of electoral reform. Presenters drove to Toronto in a snowstorm so that their views could be heard and known.

There is something to be said about the fundamentals behind such an important piece of legislation. It's important to understand how a referendum vote would be administered, and I'd be happy to explain some of those details. This legislation is rooted in the existing election process. The referendum would be administered by Elections Ontario in a way that maintains both the integrity of the election and the referendum. The powers of candidates and their scrutineers would not change, and they would retain the right to challenge electors and oversee the vote and the vote-counting process.

If passed, this bill will build on our existing election process and allow our referendum to take place with the same safeguards and protections. We recognize the need to make sure that Ontarians have confidence in the election process. We understand the importance of transparency with respect to the rules that will govern a potential referendum campaign period. This bill entrenches the importance of safeguarding the integrity of the referendum process and the electoral process.

This proposed legislation would also allow the government to create, and Elections Ontario to enforce, rules regarding referendum campaign finances. There may be spending and contribution limits set similar to those that govern parties and candidates. The structure that we have proposed for referendum campaign finances rules is similar to the Election Finances Act. It would include spending and contribution limits, advertising rules, and reporting and record-keeping requirements similar to those of governing parties and their candidates.

The regulations would impose registration requirements on those wishing to campaign in the referendum and, overall, enhance the transparency and fairness of the process.

This is, in all, an effort to ensure that a referendum campaign is carried out in a manner such that Ontarians will be equipped with the information necessary to make informed opinions in an election. These rules would enable a province-wide referendum conversation and establish an inclusive process that's good for democracy.

This legislation is about this government's faith in the people of Ontario to make the best decision about the shape of our political system. We are encouraged that so many Ontarians are enthusiastic about participating in a referendum debate. We trust the people of Ontario to approach this historic task thoughtfully and carefully and choose a course of action that will ensure Ontario continues to have a strong, vital democracy for the future. I am very proud to speak in support of this bill today, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for Renfrew—no, not Renfrew.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark—Carleton): Lanark—

The Acting Speaker: Lanark—Carleton.

Mr. Sterling: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, even though I sat with you on the select committee on this and you haven't even learned the name of my—

Interjections.

Mr. Sterling: At any rate, I guess at this point I want to emphasize that this is a Liberal Party initiative and not an initiative of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This is driven home by the whole process of this electoral reform. There was no debate in this Legislature prior to the select committee being set up. There was no invitation to members from the opposition parties or the leaders of the opposition parties for their views as to whether a citizens' assembly was the best way to travel with regard to getting to a referendum question.

Lastly, the most significant lack of consultation results when the citizens' committee comes forward with its proposal. The referendum question will not be approved by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; it will in fact be approved by the cabinet of Ontario—the Liberal Party of Ontario. The whole process is jiggered to not include the people who are elected to the Legislative Assembly at this time, and it does not seek their approval, either at the initial stages or at the final stages, for the legitimacy of this whole process. So this \$6-million exercise—what the citizens' assembly is costing the taxpayer of Ontario—is a little bit of a farce.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale—High Park): This is a cynical piece of legislation. It's cynical about democracy. It's cynical about the role of the electorate. It's cynical about the possible role of women and minorities in government. It's also cynical about their own Liberal-dominated select committee on electoral reform, included in which were Wayne Arthurs, Caroline Di Cocco, Kuldip Kular, Richard Patten, Monique Smith and Kathleen Wynne, all of whom voted unanimously for a 50%-plus-one cut-off. Instead of this, of course, what we've got is 60%, and not only 60% but also more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in 60% of the

ridings, at least 64 electoral districts. By this marker, a very few people, members of this Legislature, would be elected. In fact, only 46% of Ontarians actually voted for the Liberal Party in the last election. Clearly they have more seats than that.

What they're frightened of by passing this piece of legislation is that the citizens' assembly will actually do what they asked them to, and that is to bring in an astute and informed view of another sort of electoral system, and most specifically probably the mixed-member proportional electoral system, which would no doubt cost some Liberal seats and no doubt add to the seats of the New Democratic Party and other smaller parties in this province. They don't want to see that. That's what this bill is about. Make no mistake about it, it's an act of cynicism; it's not an act of democracy, certainly not an act of renewal. I feel sorry for the 103 members of the citizens' assembly who will in effect have wasted their time for 26 weeks when they see this Bill 155.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London—Fanshawe): I'm honoured and privileged to stand up this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 155, to open the voting system up for the public and ask their support. I think it's a very good initiative. I know our government played the role very well, according to the democratic process by which we sent people across the province. They held many different assemblies across Ontario to seek advice and to see how we can reform our voting system.

I've been listening to many opposition members and people talking about it. They say it's very difficult to pass that threshold being created by the citizens' assembly, but I want to tell the public through this spot here that many times many different parties have passed those percentages. I give an example: The NDP in 1990 got almost 57% of the total percentage of the voters. Also, the Conservatives in 1995 got almost 63% from the total vote in the province. So this threshold is not difficult to pass, and I think would be a democratic way to see the majority of people of Ontario who want to change that democratic system. It has to be a great majority. It's important to open it up to see the people in 2007 at the next election, on October 10, that when they come to vote hopefully they will choose whatever system they want and we can open it up for the people. If they choose it, then hopefully it will become a law and the whole system will be changed.

I think it's very important for our democracy. It's not like every single time and by a small minority that people come and then change the electoral system, because I think it would reflect badly on our democratic process. It's important. When we talk about elections, when we talk about voting, when we talk about representation, we have to make sure that a big majority chooses that system, because we're going to live with it for a long time to come.

1610

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): I'm pleased to join the debate on the bill and look forward to the comments from my colleague from Lanark—Carleton, Mr. Sterling,

and Mr. O'Toole's address as well. I share many of the concerns my colleague Mr. Sterling has brought forward, and will in greater detail shortly.

There's no doubt that this process is pushed towards a certain end, which I suspect will be some form of proportional representation. I believe that citizens who have volunteered themselves to these positions, those who have dedicated a tremendous amount of time on weekends to sit through endless lectures, to sit through different public meetings, will feel that they want to make change for that time. I find it hard to believe that they will even seriously consider maintaining the status quo or doing what should be done: improving the way that this place functions and strengthening individual members in the assembly. I have no doubt that those who invest their time are going to want to bring about fundamental change just by the nature of having expended those types of resources. In fact, if you look at a number of the biographies and their comments on the website, they talk about their opportunity to make historic change in the province of Ontario, to toss out this system and embrace something from God knows where, as a replacement that has not been tried in Canada before.

I'll have a chance, hopefully, to speak on this further down the line, but I resent the notion of having to sit beside another member of the assembly who represents no people, who does not have a riding to go to on weekends when the House is not in session, who is representative of no particular constituents, that if somebody is upset with a government decision, the work of their MPP, that individual will never be called on the carpet. There is a tremendous discipline to an individual MPP when he or she has to represent real people and a real part of this province, to be held accountable, and if he or she does not perform, then they quickly lose their privilege and honour of sitting in this place. That's why I reject any notion of unelected members through proportional representation.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Brampton Centre has two minutes for a response.

Mrs. Jeffrey: I'd like to thank the members from Parry Sound-Muskoka, Parkdale-High Park, London-Fanshawe and Erie-Lincoln for their comments today on Bill 155.

I'd like to use the minute and a half or so that I have to thank Minister Marie Bountrogianni for giving me the opportunity to work on this bill. It's been a very interesting few months, and I've met some very interesting individuals to talk about democratic renewal. I want to thank her for the opportunity to do that. It's been very educational.

I'd also like to thank the chair of the citizens' assembly, Mr. George Thomson, who has spent innumerable hours working on this issue. Clearly, he feels that the work that the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform has done is meaningful, and I think he's been impressed with the quality of person who has come forward and volunteered their time and their energy on this particular issue.

I'd also like, because I am the member from Brampton, to thank Theresa Vella from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, Joyce Hughes from Brampton Centre and Mappanar Sundrelingam from Brampton West-Mississauga. Those are the three Brampton citizens' assembly members who gave up so many of their weekends; I appreciate that they did that. They clearly felt this was an important issue.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank the members of the students' assembly. This is a group of young people who gave up a lot of their time in a parallel process designed to complement the work of the citizens' assembly. That was a group of young Ontarians from 14 to 18 who clearly did not all know a lot about the electoral process but became so much better informed, so much more enthusiastic than a lot of people perhaps in this room on electoral reform, people who may have started out cynically but became enthusiastic about the process. I appreciate their entertaining that debate.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Sterling: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize your work on this as the critic with regard to the select committee on electoral reform. I look forward to hearing your remarks, perhaps on another day, with regard to this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member from Durham East, should there be any time left.

Our belief, as we wrote in the dissenting report of the select committee almost a year ago now, was that the cynicism, the mistrust, the lack of confidence in this place and in the politicians does not stem from the way we elect our provincial members of Parliament. That lack of interest in voting, that lack of interest in being involved in the public process of electing people, stems from what we do after we are elected and arrive in this place. It stems from the way this institution runs and is reported to the people by the media as to how this place runs.

It's somewhat ironic that the Liberal Party of Ontario would portray themselves as revamping, or this even being any kind of democratic reform. In fact, the select committee said, as a matter of whole, that electoral reform, as opposed to parliamentary reform, is unlikely to solve the problems in our parliamentary system. All it's going to do is split this place up into a number of more parties, if we go to a mixed-member proportional system, and ensure that Ontario will govern under minority Parliaments ad nauseam into the future. It will be impossible to attain a majority in this place, given the past voting records of the public over the last 30 or 40 years. There is no party over the last 30 or 40 years that has attained a 50% majority overall from the voting public, yet we have had majority governments for most of that period of time.

Over my 30 years in this place, I have sat through majority governments, both on the government side and the opposition side, and I've sat through minority Parliaments on the government side and on the opposition side, and I believe that minority governments every so often

are not bad. But I also believe that, in the main, majority governments are necessary in order for government to be able to make decisions in a relatively short period of time in order to meet the dynamic province that we have.

The other problem I have with this democratic reform initiative by the government is that nobody is interested in this. I shouldn't say "nobody." There are a few people interested in it, but very, very few people. Prior to this citizens' assembly being set up, I've never had anybody coming into my particular office or even speaking to me at a social event who was upset with the way the 103 MPPs were elected in the last election. I've never had anybody say—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please. I know that a great deal of fun is being had after this long recess, but the member has the floor and I think he deserves your respect.

Please continue.

Mr. Sterling: I've never had anybody say that they were dissatisfied with the existing process. I think the reason that people probably like the present process is that it's relatively simple. You go into the polling booth, you see three or four names or whatever number of names on a ballot—normally, in my area, it's been four or five. There's the name of a party, which is not on the ballot—I think it should be on the ballot, but that's for another day—but they all represent one party or another and people elect them on that basis. That's the way we have carried on for almost 140 years since Confederation. Although there are problems always with politicians and the political system, it has generally served Ontario fairly well.

This lack of interest was evident. It was evident as we've gone through this process, because the people who have presented themselves at the various levels of opportunity to speak for the public have been the same groups that have come forward again and again. It is those people who represent minority interests who, for instance, have not been successful under the present electoral system. As some of the election officials told us in Ireland and Scotland, where you and I traveled, Mr. Speaker, in order to look at their particular other ways of electing politicians they are groups who want to manipulate the outcome. How they do that, of course, is through their political parties. They make a list, and if you're a good party member and you do in Parliament what the party wants you to do, you'll be on the list the next time.

1620

One of the very, very great problems with proportional representation or a list election is that the parties take a huge amount of control out of the hands of the elected members. Not long ago I sat with a delegation from a province in South Africa who were all members elected from lists. They made it quite clear to me that their independence, in terms of their decision as to what they were going to do in their legislature, was greatly constricted by their political parties. If they dared to step out of line, they would not be on the list next time through.

There are some real downsides to a change in our present system.

I said originally, a long time ago, when this process started down the road with regard to the citizens' assembly—and it is in our dissenting report written over a year ago—how could we possibly expect people, the citizens' assembly members, who had been kind enough to give up 18 weekends of their time, to come to a conclusion in the end that the present system was okay and that no change was needed? I've got to tell you, if I gave up 18 weekends of my time and got involved in all of the machinations of how different jurisdictions elect their elected representatives, I sure as heck would come up with a model that's different from the existing model because I would be convinced that the change I want is for the good.

The lack of interest that I mentioned before was not only evident to me in the last 30 years that I've served as an MPP in this place, but it was evident in the BC referendum as well. In the BC referendum, where they were able to attain 57% approval for a change to an STV system, a single transferable vote system, which probably nobody in the province understood save and except for their citizens' assembly, which recommended the STV system, nobody knew what they were voting for.

People will vote for a change in their electoral system if they are angry with the government. If the McGuinty government goes into the election on October 10—at least that's the date we have now for the next election. Who knows what it will be in the future? It was October 4 and now it's October 10. If they go into the polls on October 10 and the McGuinty government is, let's say, 20%, 25% in the polls, this referendum has a chance, whatever the question is, of passing, because people will not register their vote on the referendum necessarily on the basis of what in fact the change will be; it will be a protest vote against the existing political group that is in place. So this is a dangerous, dangerous exercise, and as such we in our party are most hesitant to support a 50%-plus-one kind of situation and therefore we do support the government with regard to 60%, because we believe that, as in the BC election, people will not be engaged in what the referendum question is and what it will actually mean in terms of their life. They won't understand that it will lead to minority governments ad nauseam into the future. They won't understand that there will be two kinds of MPPs: those who represent a single constituency and those who will have no place that they will have to go home to on the weekends to talk to their people and will be representing a larger area. They don't understand that parties like the Green Party in Scotland will not put their candidates in the constituency elections but will say to the people, "Give Norm Sterling your first vote and give us your second vote in terms of the list vote." They will be able to concentrate all of their effect on the second kind of voting and therefore will gain support in that area, and will not necessarily represent what, in fact, the people want in terms of their representation. So it leaves the political parties, when you get into these other

kinds of machinations as to how to vote, much more power and much more strategy and much more manipulation of what the result may or may not be.

So I truly believe that this process, number one, was not called for by the people of Ontario but that the people of Ontario are, in fact, fairly well satisfied with the existing system that we presently have. Be that as it may, we're going to have this referendum that will be coming down the road.

I want to predict what's going to happen during the election. What's going to happen during the election is, there's not going to be any debate about this because, as in British Columbia, the politicians who are running for the constituency seats didn't enter into the debate. Why would you get into an issue with your people about whether you were for or against the referendum when, number one, they're not very much interested in the referendum question and, number two, you might give them the wrong answer and they were going to vote for you? So they've decided on what they're going to do in the referendum but they might change their vote on you, even though that is not really relevant to what happens. What happened in the British Columbia referendum was, nobody talked about the issue. When the election commissioner came to the select committee, he talked about the lack of interest in the referendum. What he said was that—I forget the exact number of calls his election office received during the election, but it was something like these numbers: He received about 10,000 to 15,000 calls, I believe it was, with regard to the general running of the election; he received 500 calls with regard to the referendum. So the interest with regard to people trying to understand what the referendum was about was not there.

One of the things that he said was that there wasn't enough education. They handed out pamphlets to sort of tell people about it, but there was no concentrated effort on telling the people what, in fact, the referendum was about. I believe that my friend Mr. Prue, who is sitting in the chair, brought forward an amendment—and I have been a proponent of this as well—that if you're going to have a referendum, you should fund those Yes and No sides for that referendum. So there would be a debate, and at least people who would enter the polling station and vote for or against a referendum would have some idea about what they were going to enter into.

1630

Mr. Prue entered an amendment, which I supported, during the hearings on Bill 155, but which unfortunately was voted down by the majority government, against that kind of funding. In fact, it's ironic that here we are talking about democratic reform. In my view, democratic reform should include or should strive to include all members of the Legislature in the decision process. In other words, it doesn't matter whether you're a back-bencher or over here in the opposition, or over there; there should be some give and take with regard to striking a piece of legislation. I thought that, of all the amendments put forward during the very brief committee

hearing we had on Bill 155—this bill—probably the most innocent one was with regard to the funding, and there was no give at all on the part of the government with regard to that.

So my view of the Liberal government at this time is that they really don't want to talk about changing how this place works. They don't want to go toward co-operative decision-making. They don't want to try to gain the confidence of the public with regard to saying to them, "Look, all of the members of Parliament, your member, whether he sits on one side of the House or the other, will have an effect on the final decisions." They didn't really want to do that.

When I go back to the lack of interest in Bill 155, we had set aside two days of hearings for the public to come in and have their opportunity to talk on this bill, and the committee could only find enough people to fill up half a day. So that's the kind of interest there is in this whole—

Mr. Hudak: Half a day?

Mr. Sterling: Half a day. So there were one and a half days that they closed down, and the members of the committee went home.

Mr. Hudak: They cancelled it.

Mr. Sterling: They cancelled the hearings, yes.

But at any rate, I think it's instructive to talk about some of the other amendments. I supported the amendment put forward by the New Democratic Party with regard to having this Legislative Assembly approve the wording of the question. I think it's absolutely essential that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario have a debate about the wording of the question and that there be a vote on that in this place. The government wouldn't accept that amendment. It's going to be the cabinet of Ontario, the Liberal Party of Ontario, which decides what the referendum question will be.

Interjection.

Mr. Sterling: I don't know whether I'd take any ownership of that or not. I don't know whether they're going to slant that for their purposes or whether they're going to be fair about their particular question or whatever.

I believe that true parliamentary reform should be aimed at these particular areas: should be aimed at accountability of government, should be aimed at transparency of government, should be aimed at co-operative decision-making by all MPPs in this place, should be aimed at making the importance of spin as we see it on a daily basis, particularly from our health minister, less important than facts and numbers about what is happening to our services and the services we're trying to provide for the people of Ontario. I believe that parliamentary reform in this place, democratic reform, should make this place a more livable place for young women and men who have children to care for and are concerned about them. I believe that that kind of reform can be done, and can be done to make this a more livable place for us all to be involved in.

When I was the House leader for the governing party in 1997 to 1999, I brought forward an initiative in this

place to allow the government to send out a bill after first reading. The Mike Harris government used it on several occasions to send out bills after first reading. I can remember the opposition House leader at that time, Mr. Duncan, immediately saying, "No, no. We can't allow this, because it's a way of getting around debate in the Legislature." They were bound and determined they were going to force us to closure on every possible bill whether they supported it or didn't support it. But he finally figured out, after we talked about it, that this could prolong the process, rather than shorten the process. But that kind of process where you send a bill out after first reading, is something that should be used by this government more often. I think they may have used it once or twice in the whole time that they've been here, but they have not even used the present rules, the present process, to try to bring this place to more reasonable debate.

The beauty of sending a bill out after first reading is that the members go into the committee hearing, no amendment is out of order, the government and opposition parties are not locked into positioning themselves, and the members actually learn more about the legislation than they would on any other piece of legislation, because the public comes in and starts to talk about the different sections of the bill, and if the government finds that there are a lot of pressure points in a certain area, they simply bring in another bill and you go through the normal process of second reading. But if you read Hansard on second reading after a bill has been referred out after first reading, you will be amazed at the difference of quality of debate in this place, because the members who are sitting in the committee actually know what the bill is about and where the issues lie. That's a process that is there for us now to use, but it has been used very little by this government.

Democratic reform requires not only the governing party to participate; it requires all parties to participate. If you're going to have this place operate in a more reasonable and logical way, then that change has to be embraced by the opposition as well as the governing party. The opposition has to act with responsibility in debate. They have to be willing to give; they have to be willing to take. It has to be that way. Maybe some people think that after 30 years I should know better and say, "You can't have this kind of a Parliament here. You can't have that kind of thing. It is impossible in our system, because we have such an adversarial system here. There's so much spin, there are so few facts, that it's going to be difficult or impossible to change." I don't believe that. I still hold out hope that the people of Ontario will gain respect for this place and will gain respect for the members who don't get up and blather on about topics they have made no effort to research or review or put forward new ideas on.

I support some parts of Bill 155. I support the 60% threshold, primarily because I believe that the process, number one, is flawed in reaching the question; number two, I believe a higher threshold than 50% plus one is

necessary with regard to this kind of change in our electoral system. We all know that Canada almost fell apart on a 50%-plus-one vote with regard to the referendum and the separation of Quebec.

1640

When we're talking about issues of core change with regard to our parliamentary system, there has to be a higher threshold. I don't know whether it should have been 55%, 60% or whatever, but I do believe that a higher threshold can be justified with regard to it.

I lament the fact that we're going to spend \$6 million in order to come to the referendum question. I think Prince Edward Island did a much better job, where they simply had people who were involved in this particular area, experts and political scientists, come forward with some proposals and then that proposal was taken to the public.

I'm not certain that the 103 people who were picked at random are truly representative of a cross-section of Ontarians. There have been people who have criticized those particular people. I'm also aware that not all members of the citizens' assembly are still functioning. I understand that a number have quit—not formally but are just not going to the meetings anymore and are no longer participating in the process, believing either that the direction the committee is taking is wrong or that it has been taken over by special interests.

I really believe that this place is in bad need of reform. I believe that we should look at accountability; we should look at the role of our Speaker. I believe our Speaker does not have near the kind of power that he or she should have under our standing orders. I believe the Speaker should be able to say to a government member, "Your question has no urgency. It's not about your constituency. It's about trying to have a minister re-announce a program," and the Speaker should say to that member, "It's more appropriate that the minister stand up in ministerial statements and make that statement. Therefore, I will disallow your question," and move on to the next question. I believe he should allow a backbencher on the government side to ask a question if it's an urgent question, a real question to a minister about something that his constituents have to do or don't have to do, are in trouble or whatever.

When the government puts up four ministers on the same day and takes up 18 minutes of the minister's 20 minutes' allowance for minister statements, I believe the Speaker should be able to say to the opposition, "You don't have five minutes; you've got nine minutes to respond today because there have been four ministers' statements." I believe the Speaker should have that particular kind of power. I also believe that if a minister stands up and gives a two-minute statement, the opposition shouldn't have five minutes of response time; they should have maybe two minutes of response time.

I believe the Speaker should have much more discretion in running this place. I believe the Speaker should run the House leaders' meetings, as the Speaker does in Scotland. He should try to work out a schedule that is

reasonable for all parties and all members to put forward their arguments, but there would be more certainty as to the timing of events in this place and we would not have debate ad nauseam in this place where little new is put forward.

There are all kinds of opportunity in this place for renewal and reform, but that has to be done in a manner where, in fact, all members of this Legislature, and not only the governing party, have a say and have a debate over what those changes should be, even if they are part of a political platform of one party or another. We have not had that courtesy with regard to this particular matter in terms of electoral reform by this particular Liberal government.

The select committee, I might add, was only struck after people like myself continued to complain about the lack of consultation and the government had no other alternative—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Sterling:—but to strike the select committee on electoral reform. I might add that that was a good thing for the government to do.

This government has not taken advantage of the existing standing orders. When I was first elected here in 1977, there were many select committees in this place. There was a select committee on education, a select committee on the environment. There were a number of various, different select committees, and that allowed not only government ministers but government backbenchers and opposition members to become very knowledgeable in different areas of interest and to actually contribute in a positive way.

There was nothing to prevent this government over the last four years from setting up a number of select committees. I hope that any new government that wins the next election—and I hope it's us—will set up a number of select committees so that members from all parties can contribute to the enhancement of different areas of interest and expertise in this place.

Democratic reform with regard to this bill, Bill 155, and electoral reform is not going to change one iota the composition of this place in terms of women and men, it will not change the interest of the public in our parliamentary institution, and it will not gain the respect of the public in our politicians and in our Parliament.

As I said at the beginning, this is a Liberal Party process. God bless them in it. But we, and I, will not be supporting Bill 155. This bill and this referendum have nothing to do with the objective the government set out at the beginning, and that is to enhance our parliamentary system and make people regain some of the trust that has been lost, particularly over the last three and a half years under this government, here in our Parliament.

So I would like to now end my remarks and turn it over to my good friend and colleague from Durham.

The Acting Speaker: Before I recognize the member from Durham, I've called for order several times but the

ministers are pretty loud. If they want to speak they can either do it outside or keep it to a whisper, please.

The member from Durham.

Mr. O'Toole: Indeed it's a pleasure to follow the member from Lanark–Carleton, Mr. Sterling, who is the senior member in this House. I do, in all seriousness, have great respect for the time and interest that he has shown in the work of the committee as well as the dissenting report and his contributions in the debates since October 2006, when this bill was introduced. He does take the matter seriously.

I think it is an important theme, because even the remarks he made, which I listened very closely to—he has spoken on the bill several times. Many of the things have been repeated several times, maybe the same speech in many cases, but the same arguments are consistent. And that's what Minister Bountrogianni said, as reported in the *Ottawa Citizen*. This is the day after the bill was introduced, actually, and this is quoted in the *Ottawa Citizen* article here. It says, "Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Marie Bountrogianni told the Legislature 'the adoption of a new electoral system would represent a foundational change to Ontario's democracy,' noting that the Liberal government has undertaken the exercise in an attempt to reduce voter cynicism and increase turnout."

1650

That's, in summation, kind of the whole substance of what the member from Lanark–Carleton said. Now, let's deal with the argument he was making, which is the point on the cynicism. In fact, I think the cynicism, as he said, is really the process: the orders in the House, the procedures in this place. I think that's probably the most important contribution to make. A lot of his ideas were quite substantive and I think, having been House leader and in other roles over his many years here, that's where the work could be done. I can see, as a member who has sat here for a third of the time he's been here—and it's moved very quickly—there is a set procedure that somehow often seems unproductive, even in terms of the daily order paper or the agenda that we all work to here every day. The arguments that he made, and the treachery by how this place—the mechanics themselves are orderly, but the exercise of that. In his final remarks he said that the government, whoever they are, are able to have ministerial statements, and they could have four or five of them, and then we get a total of five minutes to respond. It's almost tokenistic to be giving a member less than a minute to respond to a substantive statement by a minister and yet each minister can consume up to 10 or 15 minutes, I suppose. That is one point: simple mechanics where it would empower the Speaker—or indeed the Clerk of the Legislature could make an interpretation on some issues if called upon by the Speaker. That could be sorted out, the mechanics of all of that, to allow the place and the exercise of each member. But it does come down to that whole argument that the business of the House is where this could be sorted out.

In looking over the debate on this, I would say that first of all I met with the citizens' assembly reps in my

area. I looked on the Internet to see who they were, and introduced myself. I didn't in any way imply any implication that I was trying to be interfering. I thought it was my responsibility to know those persons who assumed some role in our riding. I don't care what role they are; I would expect intelligent people to act independently, not in accordance with anything that I said specifically. But it is an important change, as was said in the article that I cited. It's a fundamental change, and that's another part of the arguments that Mr. Sterling was making. What the member for Lanark-Carleton was saying, quite frankly, was, "Is the system broken?" Yes, there could be repairs and accountability and transparency, but you know, there's a general vote, and I think that some of the review of the committee looked at other jurisdictions that have other outcomes, how effective those Parliaments or those Houses of governance operate. I draw no profound conclusion on my part, but from the research—it's the best of a bad lot, I suppose—it's the best we've got. Often in making decisions patience is important.

I want to mention the name here without getting off the record too much. Margo Bath is the Durham riding member on the citizens' assembly and, I had given her an opportunity. She said they weren't getting enough voice. In fact, the two or three meetings in Durham were actually held before Christmas—long before Christmas, long before anyone knew. This thing was introduced on October 24 or 25, whatever the date was—October 24. They had meetings in November. There were 13 people at the meetings and she was quite disappointed, whether it was apathy or whether it was just plain indifference. But I felt that it was the lack of information. In fact, she didn't raise any complaints except she felt very enthusiastic about, first of all, being selected randomly.

Secondly, she thought that it was an important responsibility or privilege to have a voice in that and wondered why she was there. So I said, "You could come to my annual levee, which is held in January. It's a non-partisan event," and it is. In fact, the mayors have one. I've had one for 12 years and always participated in them in the 10 or so years that I was involved in council. So it is not something new. It is a great time to meet, in a non-partisan way, citizens who are interested in the public process. Let's leave it at that. I treat it as such.

In fact, this year the Durham Youth Orchestra was the backdrop for the levee, and I asked Margo Bath if she would like to address those attendees, which she did. I didn't give her a script, nor would I even expect that she would think I would try to influence her in any way. She brought with her a couple of students from the various high schools who were involved in this citizens' assembly process. I found it quite refreshing, with the Durham Youth Orchestra playing, with Ms. Bath speaking in an open way about how important it was for the people's franchise to vote. It was an important contribution to the levee in my riding of Durham, so I'd just say that.

I think of other persons who, through a process of public participation, are recognized citizens who think

that the current system is fine and often have said to me, "It's important, John, that you represent us." I think it then comes down to the next level that the member for Lanark-Carleton was trying to make: It's important for the members to be accountable in their actions here and the role and the voice they bring on behalf of all of their constituents to this assembly. That could be dealt with, as the point has been made, by their actions and the standing orders here that determine the agenda of the day.

I, myself, have had the privilege of being in a few other countries. More recently, in December, I was in London, where my daughter had her first child; I think I said that before Christmas here. I went to Westminster and to the House of Lords. I didn't want to babysit all the time I was there. It was quite interesting, because the debates were very similar to the issues we're hearing. I did notice a couple of things. I did get a copy of their order paper, and the sequence of events was much like here. I had a chance to meet a number of members in their dining room and talk to them about the issues and process. One of the most important differences I noticed, quite frankly, was that the questions are written in advance and given to the minister and they get a response, not the blah, blah, blah that we get from George Smitherman and Dalton McGuinty. We never got that from Mike Harris. He actually—

Interjections.

Mr. O'Toole: To get back on topic, the process here is quite different, where often the question is off—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I have been reminded, and the reminder is correct, that you must refer to members either by their ministry or by their riding and not by name.

Mr. O'Toole: I often want to recognize the member from Peterborough, but he's so infrequently here that it's hard sometimes to do.

The Acting Speaker: I would remind the member that you cannot comment on the attendance or non-attendance of any member, and I think you should retract that.

Mr. O'Toole: Yes, I retract that because, quite frankly, all members who are in the House deserve to be recognized when they're here, certainly. That's the point I was trying to make. It's great that people were actually listening to what I was saying, which is a nice compliment to the process.

What I was trying to say is that citizens, in the broadest sense, do like to be respected for their participation in their community. For that part, I want to thank Margo for her participation and the students and the community that have participated in the process.

When you come to the concluding remarks that the member from Lanark-Carleton was trying to make—is the system broken? His leading argument was that they're expected almost to come up with one of these new, revised systems. It's almost inherent in saying, "Here's your mandate. Change the system." I heard that their opening meetings started off by saying that the current system is broken; I had people tell me this personally. I suspect that you shouldn't lead the debate

when you're asking for input, as you're asking for our input as opposition.

I know there was a dissenting report. Mr. Prue and Mr. Sterling probably spent, as members of that committee, a lot of thoughtful time to make some observations.

I just want to mention again—this may be slightly off the debate, but it is important to mention—that leadership in my community takes many forms. Certainly I feel privileged to be here, but there are other people who do other things that are important, and that's why I listen to what my constituents tell me, which empowers me to say what many times I say here. For instance, the Rotary Club in most of our communities are important leaders who volunteer and are community builders—service above self. I have spoken to three or four Rotary Clubs in my riding of Durham over the last intersession between Christmas and now. They have what they call the four questions of truth. I think it's very important that all members should read it—

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's the four-way test.
1700

Mr. O'Toole: A four-way test of truth is what it is. I think that's important.

I attended an event which was the Paul Harris awards. One of the persons was just a citizen at large, but I knew her when I was a local councillor, a regional councillor, as being the head of the women's institute—just a wonderful, wonderful person. "Partisan" means nothing. The politics is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about people's views that I listened to. She said that traditions are so important, that we need to protect them but we can always improve them. That was Vi Ashton. Another person I had spent some time with when I was a library trustee, before I was even elected in 1982, is Pat Best, a well-known artist and a wonderful, wonderful lady, but also a leader and a voice for the community. I think it's important to listen to these people. Those people are as important, no less or no more, as Margo, is my point.

I would love to have been empowered as a member independently. This could have happened by McGuinty's orders or the terms of reference for this process. Mr. Sterling was saying pretty much the same thing. The attempt to consult with members could have been thought about more comprehensively, to solicit. It could easily be dismissed if it was just a political rant that I submitted. But when I think of who I would have contacted—I'm going through that name list—it would be substantive, as was the case when we were government and we had the International Year of Older Persons. We were all given a certain sum of money to work with our community partners. That was a terrific process; it really was. I went to the hospital foundations and the various leaders in the community and we took the \$20,000 and made it into about \$250,000 by them raising funds to build memorial gardens or whatever it was.

The point I'm making is, I don't think the process was anything more than a checkbox, that we'd got it done. I become even more cynical when I look at the legislation itself. The double-threshold issue is one of the most

cynical thresholds—now, whether it's right or whether I agree with the number is not the point. They're the government; they're accountable for the legislation that they present to the people as a democratic renewal debate. It's anything but that. It's a failed outcome. It's a planned failure.

If you look at the editorial interpretations of this—that's what I'm reading from. I'm reading from Murray Campbell, a person who I think writes subjectively and intelligently, in his article in the *Globe* on October 26. I still go back to my community, as it being in the best interests of the public, when you think that all politics is local, as has been said by many, many of the people who have stood on this floor.

I think of persons like Kevin Anyan, who has been president of the Rotary Club, whom I've gotten to know. I think of Al Strike. Any fundraising event for building a hospital wing, for building an arena, for helping Boy Scouts—he was on the Trillium Foundation—he's a great citizen; the politics means nothing.

I'm saying, these are the people I would consult with to make a valid contribution to this important and, as the minister said, fundamental change, to democracy or the democratic process. That would have been true democratic renewal, to respect our role as members and expect—at least entrust us to go to our communities to look for and examine, from a range of people, some options to look forward to.

I could simply sum up by saying that the member from Lanark—Carleton, in the dissenting report—his comments in October of last year and his comments today really said the same thing: We should look at the standing orders themselves, to see what would have been a better way to improve the outcome of this process.

I really do want to make some reference to—this may be the only political part of what I say. First of all, you've got to trust the motives. Sometimes it's important for leaders like Premier McGuinty to establish trust first. This is what has become, and remains, troubling today. Leadership must be first and foremost about trust and integrity. That would apply to anyone who presents themselves as leadership.

How would one measure that characteristic or quality of trust in leadership? I looked at the election material that was presented to the people of Ontario, and then I looked at the outcomes. I became more and more cynical as I moved along, because I remembered that the very first thing they did, quite frankly, was to break their promise, with the largest tax increase in the history of Ontario, now a big argument by George Smitherman, as if it is a centrepiece of his argument, the \$2.5 billion—

The Acting Speaker: If you want to refer to the Deputy Premier or if you want to refer to the Minister of Health, you should do so. I caution: Please use the title.

Mr. O'Toole: The member from Beaches—East York—Deputy Speaker—I'll try and get all these titles lined up here.

The Deputy Premier today—because the Premier wasn't here; he was off doing something else, I'm sure. But the Deputy Premier was here.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Is that George Smitherman?

Mr. O'Toole: The member from Welland-Thorold is telling me it's Mr. Smitherman. I guess the point I'm trying to make there would be that when you want to establish respect and trust, you look to a person's record. If you want to know the future, you should look to the past. And I have, quite frankly, a litany of failed commitments. This is what's most troubling about the relationship of leadership with the people and, as Minister Bountrogianni, the minister of democratic renewal, said, the cynicism. Who is responsible for that cynicism? That's the point that was made during her introduction of the bill: to correct that.

The very first things they did—the list is so long it is heartbreaking, quite frankly. I intend to repeat this as frequently as possible, with as much dignity and respect as it deserves.

The four-way test is a good example. The truth is something that I think responds to this whole thing of the cynicism and trust arguments that were made by the minister. I look at the raised taxes, the rolling back, the 407, the health tax, the provincial debt, the failed commitment on autism, the failed commitment for long-term care—still there on Bill 140—the autism argument, the P3 hospitals. The cynicism is in the execution of their plan.

So when you say you have got democratic renewal, look to the history. And then you look at the cynicism, the 60% threshold. Don't trust a single word the person over there says. Quite frankly, I get so upset because it is difficult to argue logistically or rationally with someone who fails to communicate with integrity and trustworthiness. That's an important characteristic, and, if you want, the people of Ontario, the people of Canada, indeed, don't trust the leadership. Look in the mirror. When asking a question, do you get an answer? Look at Hansard today, to the Deputy Premier's responses to the children's mental health questions, to the \$10-an-hour question that was raised. The answers are almost cynical themselves. No wonder the people have lost faith. And this bill does nothing but reinforce the chicanery of this process, of what they are actually trying to do.

Interjections.

Mr. O'Toole: "Treachery" perhaps would be a better and more exact word.

I'm repeating—I think it's best to go to third sources—what Murray Campbell said here: "Legislation introduced yesterday"—this is on October 25, 2006—"would require the endorsement of 60%" of those ballots cast, so it's 60% of every ballot cast, plus "50% support in a minimum of 64 constituencies" of 108 constituencies. So that's a double threshold, technically. It's designed to fail, as Murray Campbell said.

1710

If you want to ask for honest feedback—otherwise I can finish up the debate now and support the observations of the member from Lanark-Carleton, who made similar arguments. I just brought some other perspectives

to it, so I ask all members to recognize how important this is, as the minister said. The debate on democratic renewal should start right in this place itself, perhaps even with me and each one of us here today. He who has not failed, stand up. Quite frankly, every person makes mistakes.

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: Mr. McNeely, the member from Ottawa-Orléans, has just barked over there as well, and I'm quite surprised. What he's saying here to me now is, as I understand it, that he hasn't made any mistakes. It's interesting that he would say that. It's good to have on the record that he says he hasn't made any mistakes.

The point I'm making here is that I'm standing to say that this particular discussion today—

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: We have another person barking over there. The member from Nipissing has had lots to say on this. I'm surprised that they're trying to, quite frankly—

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I don't believe that "barking" is parliamentary language.

The Acting Speaker: I'm not sure about the parliamentary nature, but I think it is an unfortunate term and perhaps that should be withdrawn.

Mr. O'Toole: I'll withdraw that and just say "barracking." But it was not and should not be intended that way. I would just say that those were comments being fired back to me and I was responding to them as it should be, I suppose, if there is a debate and if they're indeed engaged in listening and hopefully taking some reflection on the comments I've made on the trust and integrity issue that I try to bring to the debate, and somewhat on a sensitive matter reflecting on how the minister introduced the bill and how the members here today have responded to any sort of criticism to their way or that only they know best.

If the system is broken, I would expect someone in their two-minute response to explain the evidence that the system is broken and some way to improve it. If I were to look at some of the systems that have been suggested and describe them: It's the alternative majority where the voters would rank all candidates in order of preference and a candidate must get 50% plus one to vote. Proportional representation would select a party. Seats are allocated according to the proportion of votes that the party received. In a mixed-member proportional, voters cast two votes on one ballot, one for the party and one for the candidate.

So what we're doing is taking the simple exercise of me going in, being familiar with the plan, the promises made and the trustworthiness of the candidate that said it, whether they have that trustworthiness or not, and casting a single ballot. It has worked rather successfully for a couple of hundred years, and they are suggesting to us that it is broken. I am putting to you that it isn't the system that's broken. Perhaps it's the system in here, whether it's me or others, and the debate and often the futility of the questions in the Legislature and how well

that system itself works. So I leave that, as I wouldn't be supporting this bill based on those premises, those arguments.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: I'm grateful for the participation in this debate by the member for Lanark-Carleton, who's known in his riding, of course, as Norm Sterling and extremely well known as being a long-serving member, Mr. Sterling is, and indeed the dean of this Legislature, joined by his colleague from Oshawa—Durham, Mr. O'Toole. I almost incorrectly identified his riding. It's Mr. O'Toole.

I'm grateful for their participation in the debate. People should be very careful as they're listening to this debate, because what we've got here is some real bait and switch on the part of the Liberals. Three and a half years later, darned near four years later, you can't trust them any more than you could a year ago, two years ago or three years ago. As a matter of fact, you could probably trust them even less. And let me tell you, that takes the trust level to pretty—we're down to the basement then. excavating. We're digging up clay sewer pipe. That's how far down you are in the trust level when it comes to Liberals here at Queen's Park.

I'm going to have a chance to speak to this bill in around eight minutes' time. Ms. DiNovo, the member from Parkdale-High Park, is going to be speaking to the comments made by Mr. Sterling and Mr. O'Toole, the members from Lanark-Carleton and Durham, respectively. I, of course, look forward to the lead speech by our member from Beaches-East York, Michael Prue, who is an expert in this whole issue of proportional representation and who has provided counsel to this caucus.

I want to tell you that we oppose this legislation. This legislation is a sham. It's a hoax on the people of Ontario. I have a chance to speak to it in yet a few minutes. I'm looking forward to it.

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): I am pleased to be able to respond to the members from Lanark-Carleton and Durham. It's important to note that there is interest in this topic. I say this because I certainly went in my riding, when the citizens' assembly came to the riding, and found that there was a really interesting and engaged citizenry that wanted to talk about this. I also found that in a current poll that was done, an SES Research-Osprey Media poll, six out of every 10 voters who were surveyed in this province think it's time to look at changing the way MPPs are elected at Queen's Park. That's a huge number.

As you know, Speaker, we sat on the select committee on electoral reform, as did the member from Lanark-Carleton. Certainly we learned a great deal about various systems and know that there is no panacea in changing a system, because every system has its pros and cons. But having this conversation after, I believe, 215 years is important in a healthy democracy. The process in this bill is just to put in place the steps for a referendum if the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform should recom-

mend that Ontario change the way members of this Legislature are elected. I think that's a good process, to have a referendum, in case they do want to change and take a significant step in changing our system.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I am most pleased to comment on the speeches of my good friends and colleagues from Lanark and Durham—I think I've got them straight—because this is a very important issue. We're about to decide, conceivably, through a referendum, the electoral process in Ontario and the reform of same.

In that regard, I think everyone should be familiar now with the citizens' assembly. A citizens' assembly has been established representing 103 current ridings. These citizens are required to meet two weekends a month until May 15, 2007. As you heard, some of the citizens may not choose to meet according to the requirements for one reason or another, including disillusionment in the process. These individuals are paid a stipend, so they are not doing it as volunteers. My riding is so strong in volunteers, I'm used to volunteers assisting our community, but these citizens are in fact paid a stipend, which is \$150 per day plus travel and accommodation. Both of my colleagues have pointed out our party's concern with this particular act and, further, the process. Whether it will enhance or act to the detriment of our democracy remains to be seen.

1720

Ms. DiNovo: I would like to address the comments that were made by our Minister of Culture or, I should say, their Minister of Culture. Having the conversation—

The Acting Speaker: I would remind the member that you are commenting on the speakers, not someone who has commented on the speakers.

Ms. DiNovo: Having the conversation is all that these poor folk who are involved in the citizens' assembly are going to be able to have because of Bill 155. They actually thought that they would get a say, and that their say was worth something. I had a young teacher, who is our member in the citizens' assembly, come into my office. She felt absolutely betrayed by Bill 155. She felt as if all the work that she'd done, which is equivalent, really, to getting a master's in political science, was just going to go out the window because of this cut-off of 60%. I think that if you asked any group of people, just about anywhere, what they felt a majority was, they would answer with the commonsense response that a majority is 50% plus one. Yet here we have—not only here, of course, but in BC too where 58% of the people effectively had their votes nullified because they didn't reach that magic 60%, and then the government turned around and only got in the 40s to get re-elected.

I also wanted to correct something that the Liberal member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, Mr. Kular, said. Actually, the McGuinty Liberals won 46% of the votes in 2003, and the Harris Conservatives won 45% of the votes in 1995 and 1999. So here we have a classic case in this very House, in this very Legislature, where the 60% cut-off wouldn't have worked for either of these governments.

So, again, what we're talking about, what we're asking for here is a real referendum. If we're going to have a citizens' assembly, if they're going to spend the time, then let's give them some time and let's give them a real vote.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Lanark—Carleton has two minutes in which to respond.

Mr. Sterling: I would like to thank all members for responding to our remarks. My belief is that we really, truly do need democratic reform for this institution in order to gain the respect and the confidence of the people of Ontario, and to get people back involved in the electoral process. This is not going to make one scintilla of difference. In fact, it has the reverse effect. It could lead to more cynicism when people find that the people who are running their province are not directly elected and not directly accountable. That's a debate for another time.

I would also like to acknowledge, however, the Minister of Culture, Caroline Di Cocco. I think it should be noted that she was the chair of the select committee on electoral reform, and I found that her understanding and her involvement in this democratic reform initiative was probably the most exemplary of all of the government in this regard. She did her job without prejudice, and I want to thank her publicly for what she did with regard to that process. I only wish that the Premier and the present minister would have treated the subject as she did in that select committee.

The Acting Speaker: Time for further debate.

Mr. Kormos: I seek unanimous consent for the New Democratic Party lead to be held down.

The Acting Speaker: Is it agreed that the lead be held down? Agreed.

Mr. Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

Unfortunately, the critic for the New Democratic Party, the member for Beaches—East York, is sitting in the chair today and, while in the House, because he's in the chair, cannot do his one-hour lead in criticism of this bill, which is why we sought and are grateful for the unanimous consent given by all members permitting him to do his lead on yet another occasion when this bill is called.

There won't be very many more occasions when this bill is called; people should understand that very clearly. This is third reading. The end is near. The government, the Liberals at Queen's Park, were oh so unresponsive to members of the public who appeared before the standing committee expressing concern about the government drafting of Bill 155 and the betrayal by the government of people in Ontario who were sincerely committed to and interested in participating in, as citizenry, as residents, as voters, as taxpayers, a reform of the political process that makes it more representative, more accessible, and, one would hope, more democratic.

I want to commend the select committee and the New Democratic Party member for Beaches—East York. It's well known that Michael Prue was, of course, on that committee. That committee had a rigorous schedule of

visiting a modest number of PR—proportional representation—jurisdictions, talking to politicians, bureaucrats, analysts, political scientists in those communities. They did a tremendous amount of work in relatively short order and made some very sound recommendations. This tripartite committee made some very important recommendations, some very effective ones.

The tripartite committee recommended that the threshold for a referendum be 50% plus one, a majority, a principle that is deeply entrenched, rooted in democracy.

It would also have been the wish and desire, and it certainly is of New Democrats, that if this referendum process is going to be a meaningful one in which all Ontarians can participate in an effective way—let's understand, there are going to be some very high-priced hill and knoll type campaigns being launched by some very powerful interests, aren't there, Ms. Di Novo? And it's imperative, New Democrats say, if the citizenry, if folks out there—voters, residents, taxpayers—are going to be able to participate meaningfully in a referendum campaign and debate, that there be funding for those efforts. Let's understand—and we'll talk about the remarkable threshold in just a minute. But let's understand that this referendum, if this bill passes—and, oh, I tell you, it will, because the Liberals have a majority in the House that they are not afraid to mobilize and use even if their majority vote is contrary to the will and the well-being and the interests of the people of the province, and this Liberal majority government isn't afraid at all to use time allocation to guillotine debate, to shut it down.

Why, on a bill as important as reform of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, on a debate as relevant as a debate around human rights, this government—didn't they, Ms. DiNovo? —guillotined debate, slammed the door in the faces of hundreds of Ontarians who had been promised an opportunity to make submissions to the legislative committee.

1730

So here is a very and most undemocratic government daring to talk about democratic reform, but when we look at the details—you don't even have to look at the fine print—there's nothing democratic and there's nothing reform-bent about this legislation at all.

I do want to thank the parliamentary assistant, Ms. Jeffrey, from Brampton Centre because she, of course, in the time-honoured tradition, is sitting with the debate on this bill here in the Legislature. As we all know, it's been a tradition here in this Legislature, as it is in most, that either the minister or his or her parliamentary assistant not only lead in the debate, but then remain present through the debate. So I want to commend the parliamentary assistant, the member for Brampton Centre, Ms. Jeffrey. I suspect that the parliamentary assistant knows that this government's threshold around a referendum is flawed, but of course she's paid to say that it isn't, isn't she, Speaker? She has a job that makes her responsible for trying to justify this legislation.

Let's understand that if the bill passes, there will be a referendum. Now, will the question that's going to be put

on the referendum be decided by this House, by this chamber? Will it decide in the same way that the tripartite select committee was able to sit down, work collaboratively, and arrive at recommendations that were unanimously supported—weren't they, Speaker? Unanimous: all three parties. Is this chamber going to have an opportunity to entertain a motion wherein the question that will be put will be presented, and there will be opportunities for people to make amendments to that motion such that there can be some fine-tuning of the question to be put? No. And there's no safeguard. The legislation says that the wording of the referendum question shall be clear, concise and impartial. But, hell's bells, if at the end of the day it's none of those, there's no recourse by anybody about the legitimacy of the question, is there? None whatsoever. The legislation says the wording shall be clear. It could be the muddiest wording in the world, because there's nothing anybody here or outside of here can do about it. It could be anything but concise, and there's nothing anybody here or out there can do about it. It could be anything but impartial, and there's nothing anybody here or out there can do about it.

At the very worst, there could be some futile litigation, which I suspect will be to no avail, because, you see, the legislation lets the government determine the question to be put on the referendum in the dark rooms, in the bowels, back in the smoke-filled sanctuary, in the halls of the power brokers, with no public debate, no public scrutiny, no legislative scrutiny. This in and of itself demonstrates this government's complete lack of commitment to democratic reform. If anything, it illustrates that Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals have nothing but disdain and scorn for the democratic process and revel in the freedom of the backrooms and the secret deals with who knows what private interest is out there.

Let's take a look at the threshold. Is it a democratic threshold of 50% plus one? In other words, if 50% plus one of the voters in the province of Ontario approve or don't approve the referendum question, is that conclusive? No. What has the Liberal government done in their effort to quash, to silence, to snuff out the very prospect of democratic reform? They've created that 60% threshold. The result of the referendum is binding, and we'll get to what it binds the government to do because that, at the end of the day, is the total illustration of how this government is mocking the people of Ontario with this legislation, because if the referendum passes it doesn't really require the next government to do anything. Let me get to that in just a minute. For it to pass, it would need 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast. In other words, at least 60% of all votes in Ontario have to support the referendum proposal. But that's not good enough. It also requires that 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in each of at least 64 electoral districts—in other words, you know what they are saying, don't you? In at least half of the electoral districts in Ontario—more than half—there has to be 50%-plus-one support, and across the province there has to be 60%.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): That's it: double majority.

Mr. Kormos: "Double majority," Mr. Ramsay says, in criticism of the legislation—an astute member. By considering his political background, I can understand why he would have a little more sensitivity to true democracy than some of his colleagues and I appreciate his input into this debate.

But having said all that, what does a successful referendum campaign do for the people of Ontario when it comes to democratic reform, when it comes to proportional representation? Why, it requires the government of the day to introduce legislation before December 2008; in other words, before December of the next year. It doesn't require them to call it for second or third reading. It doesn't require them to put it to committee. It doesn't require them to pass it.

Let's look at how cynical that was. It was but a few months ago that one newly elected Conservative Prime Minister said, "Oh yes, to appease the ultra rightists, the cranky old men and, I suppose, women of the Reform Party around the issue of same-sex marriage, we'll put the question before the House," but of course knowing full well that the question wouldn't pass because even Conservatives wouldn't vote for it, would they?

You see, the government elected in October 2007 is not compelled to pass any legislation; it's compelled to put the bill forward. If there is a political party that has a majority in the House that does not support proportional representation, they will be compelled to put the bill forward but won't be compelled to even call it for second reading. And there is not a damned thing anybody here or out there is going to be able to do about it, is there? Nothing.

You've been had. You've been taken to the cleaners. You've been mugged. You've been rolled in an alleyway and had your pockets emptied. The Dalton McGuinty Liberals have grabbed you by the ankles, turned you upside down and shaken every last nickel and dime out of you. And then McGuinty's Liberals roll you into the gutter and have the audacity to stuff a little Liberal fundraiser pamphlet in your pocket. You've been slapped six ways to Sunday by these Liberals, and Dalton McGuinty and his gang expect you to be grateful. Good Lord, I thought the Senate was a gaggle of horse thieves, ne'er-do-wells and ill-deservers. They pale in comparison to the Liberals at Queen's Park—incredible. This is a totally new definition for chutzpah. The word has been redefined: a 60% threshold, 50% in at least 50% of the ridings, and then even if the referendum question is approved, the government doesn't have to do diddly-squat. It can, as was suggested earlier by the Deputy Premier, sit on its hands or, as we say down in Welland and Niagara where I come from, twist and twirl. It's true.

1740

New Democrats aren't going to support this. This is less than a joke. There are folks out there who believe sincerely that we need some dramatic reform of our

political system if we're going to make it more representative, if we're going to make it fairer, if it's going to work more effectively for people to abandon their cynicism about it, and if in fact the citizenry—the people of this province, the residents of this province, the voters of this province, the taxpayers of this province—are going to feel respected enough to participate and involve themselves with the political process, with the parliamentary process.

There is a huge opportunity for all of us to make that happen. New Democrats, I tell you—make no mistake about it—don't need a referendum to tell them where they stand on an issue. New Democrats have been leading the fight for proportional representation here in the province of Ontario, with Jack Layton and predecessors before him across the country, haven't they? Because New Democrats vote. Do you want to get more women into this Legislature? Proportional representation. Do you want to get more ethnic diversity in this Legislature? Proportional representation. Do you want to make sure that underrepresented groups, underrepresented constituencies out there from all parts of Ontario are represented in this Legislature? Proportional representation. Do you want to make sure that every vote counts? Proportional representation.

New Democrats have adopted, as policy, effective proportional representation, and we haven't left ourselves the wiggle room that the Liberals do. But oh, my goodness, let's make one thing perfectly clear. If we haven't learned anything yet, we surely have learned this: The nice thing about being a Liberal is you don't always have to be a Liberal. They demonstrate it on a daily basis. They campaign like New Democrats; they govern like Tories. They cross the floor. Heck, walking from the Liberal side to the Tory side, Tory side to the Liberal side, you don't know who is who any more. Is it Belinda? Is it Mr. Khan? I don't know. You can't tell one from the other, can you?

This is a shameful hoax. This is a very sad day. New Democrats are prepared to sit in this Legislature until May, when the constituency week is, and we're prepared to come after the constituency week. Because just as every New Democrat is prepared to stand, be counted and be heard on this incredible insult to the people of Ontario—Bill 155—we are prepared to give every single Liberal in this chamber the same opportunity—aren't we, Ms. DiNovo?

Ms. DiNovo: Absolutely.

Mr. Kormos: If that means we have to sit an extra day—or two days or three days or four days or five days—to accommodate Liberals whose constituents deserve to know where they stand on 60% plus 50% of 50% thresholds, New Democrats are going to work hard to make sure that those Liberals have that chance.

More importantly, we're prepared to let Liberals stand up and explain why even if a hard-fought referendum battle is successful for the advocates of proportional representation, that means dip, zip, nada, nothing, zero to the next government elected in October 2007. You can fight your hearts out in the course of a referendum debate

and battle and end up with nothing—and nothing is what you get from the Liberals. Don't even think of asking for anything more.

New Democrats, by the way, aren't going to be supporting Bill 155.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Jeffrey: I'm glad to join this debate again. I guess that I can appreciate the member from Niagara Centre's passion, but I don't share his cynicism. I wanted to enter the conversation and talk about something that I was refreshed by during the course of the debate on Bill 155, and that was the activity that the student assembly carried out. I think all of us, at some point, got to hear about our students. They were 14 to 18. They were enthusiastic and passionate. They spent a considerable amount of time learning about the inner workings of the electoral process and the system. They were enthusiastic and engaged. They have lots of good ideas, and I am encouraged by the thousands of young Ontarians who have brought this discussion to their schools. Even though they knew that what they were doing was only going to be taken as a recommendation by the citizens' assembly, they threw their very heart into it.

I appreciate that it was an original idea. It was a made-in-Ontario solution, and there are other jurisdictions that are looking at what happened with the student assembly in Ontario. There were 103 student members. I had one in Brampton Centre. They went back to their schools and talked about it in their classrooms with their teachers. Their teachers were engaged. They tried to get programming that helped students understand. I'm sure they took that home and talked to their parents, who may have been cynical about the electoral system. I, for one, am not. I believe that that participation is really important. Now that the students are involved, I hope their parents will be less cynical or skeptical about our political future.

Young people carry a special weight. They represent the voice of young Ontarians. Young Ontarians have a lot to add to this debate, and I think they are engaged. I think there are people out there watching to see if we can deliver what we promised. We have opened the debate. I'm not cynical about it. I trust Ontarians to come to this thoughtfully and carefully, and I look forward to their recommendations.

Ms. DiNovo: I thank particularly my colleague from Niagara Centre for his impassioned defence of democracy, which is what it amounts to, in this House.

Clearly, unlike Ms. Jeffrey from Brampton Centre, the real cynics here are the Liberals and this Liberal government. They're cynical about their own electorate. They're cynical about democracy, and they're cynical about their citizens' assembly. They're even, as I said at the top of this hour, cynical about their own select committee on electoral reform, a committee upon which Caroline Di Cocco, Minister of Culture, sat and voted for 50% plus one.

You also heard my colleague speak about the fact that this is going to hurt women and ethnic minorities as well as the electorate in general and democracy in general,

and there's a very good example of how that works. For example, should this assembly go for a mixed-member proportional electoral system and follow the example of Wales and Scotland; they would see the proportional representation of women go up, as it did in Scotland perhaps, from 10% to 48%, or in Wales where it went from 15% to 20% right up to 52%. They don't want to see that. They speak about women's rights, but they don't want to see actual women's rights in government; otherwise they'd let this citizens' assembly do its job and actually go ahead with the 50% plus one rather than, as you heard my colleague speak about it, the impossible 60% plus 60% of ridings, this impossible task, and then, as you heard Mr. Kormos from Niagara Centre say, there's no compunction upon them to act even then.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I think from some of the previous comments, people at home must be really wondering exactly what we're talking about. It's probably essential to this debate that we get back to why we're having this debate in the first place. It allows the people of the province of Ontario, for the first time in their history, to take a look at the way we're governed. We can sit here and argue about the nuances and whether it should be 60% or 50% or whether it should be half the ridings or simple majority plus one. The concept, the idea, is that some people in the past have said that they don't believe the current system serves them well. Other people have said that the current system is fine; leave it as it is. It appears that in the middle, the vast majority of people feel that perhaps there should be some changes considered to the system. Perhaps we should take a look at some of the other systems that are used around the world and see if any one of those systems could be brought into place in the province of Ontario in a way that will serve future generations the way the previous one has in the past for all of us here and for the people that came before us. We have set out a process that would allow that to happen. We have gone to the people, asked them to take a look at other systems that exist around the world. Actually, using the system we have, one of the first things that you find out is that we're in a minority in this country and province in the system that we use. There are other systems in the world that actually use much different systems and still achieve a democratic system.

What I don't think is fair to the 103 people that we've asked—ordinary people from around Ontario—is to presuppose what decision they should come up with, what decision they should make, which decision you'd like to see them make. I have my own preferences and certainly

wouldn't think for a minute of inflicting that preference upon those 103 members. I'm looking forward to what they bring forward. I'm looking forward to the debate that follows. I'm looking forward to the referendum and the results, because we're the party—and this whole House, I hope, at the end of the day—that will be the government that brings this choice to the people and allows it to happen.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any further questions and comments? Seeing none, the member from Niagara Centre has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kormos: The problem is, there aren't going to be any more debates. There won't be any debate around the wording of the referendum question. If the referendum is successful—and the government has engineered a scheme to make it highly unlikely that the referendum is successful—but if it is, there won't be any debate around the wording of the legislation that is presented for first reading. And there won't be any debate about that legislation if the government of the day decides not to call it for second reading. And there will be even less debate after the first proroguing of that House. Think about it. When the government has complied with its obligations pursuant to Bill 155, at the first proroguing of the House, the bill disappears and goes off into that legislative orbit—where by now there is a constellation of bills, both government and private member; galaxies—and is never heard from again. The government of the day has complied, and the issue is gone.

New Democrats are very clear about our support for proportional representation. We think it is a better way, just like so many of the western European countries, amongst others, think it is a better way. The minister says—

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: It's not for us to decide.

Mr. Kormos: That's exactly the point. That's why you're making the big bucks, Minister. You are making the big bucks to make political decisions, to campaign on ideas, to put ideas out there to the people of Ontario and to be either elected or not elected on the basis of those ideas and to come back here and give effect to the will of the people of Ontario. "That's not what we're to decide"? We decide all sorts of things every day. That's what you are elected to decide.

The Acting Speaker: In the absence of the official clock, I must rely upon my own watch, which, being close enough to 6 o'clock, this House stands recessed until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Acting Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffière par intérim
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 21 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 21 mars 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTH SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DU SYSTÈME DE SANTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 20, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 171, An Act to improve health systems by amending or repealing various enactments and enacting certain Acts / *Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à améliorer les systèmes de santé en modifiant ou en abrogeant divers textes de loi et en édictant certaines lois.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I'm delighted to have this chance this evening to speak to Bill 171, the Health System Improvements Act, 2007, which was initially introduced in this Legislature before Christmas, I believe on December 12, and second reading has commenced in this Legislature.

I was glad to be in the House last night to hear the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care lead off this debate. He was quite proud of himself, as he tends to be, and very proud of the fact that this is his 10th bill as Minister of Health. He has served as Minister of Health for about three and a half years. He is the longest-serving Minister of Health in the McGuinty government, and here he is to hear our comments tonight. I'm pleased that he is here to hear this debate because we have a lot of interesting ideas to put forward in this House with respect to this bill.

I'm certainly looking forward to the speech that will be given by our party's health critic, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, our party's deputy leader as well, a former Minister of Health, who has served in the health field with some distinction, obviously. She will be giving the comprehensive overview of the position of our party at the appropriate time. But I'm glad to be here tonight to give my perspective as the member for Waterloo–Wellington.

Mr. Speaker, as you're well aware, this bill would add four more regulated health professions under the Regulated Health Professions Act, creating three new profes-

sional colleges: naturopathy, homeopathy, kinesiology and psychotherapy. We're also aware that this bill would enhance the services that optometrists, dental hygienists, pharmacy technicians and interns provide.

This bill is intended to create a new medical audit system for physicians who are billing for their services to OHIP, the Ontario health insurance plan.

The bill establishes protection from civil liability if an automated external defibrillator were used in good faith to save a life. That's obviously something we support, and it's an issue that's been brought forward in private members' time. I know you've supported that in your capacity as the MPP for Essex, Mr. Speaker, something I agree with obviously as well.

The bill proposes the creation of an arm's-length public health agency modelled on the Centers for Disease Control in the United States. I believe it's located and headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, if I'm not mistaken. Our agency, as proposed, if the bill were to pass into law, would be called the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion.

This bill would also facilitate the implementation of a new integrated air and land ambulance system to manage transfers of patients between health care facilities.

The bill proposes the transfer of legislative responsibility for five categories of non-residential and seasonal residential drinking water systems from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The bill, of course, as we know, amends or enacts a number of other miscellaneous acts.

This bill is an omnibus bill. We know, those of us who have served in government—I'm glad to see my colleague the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound here. We recall the position of the Liberal Party when they sat on this side in opposition for eight years, and I know the Minister of Health was here from 1999 on. They were quite critical of any omnibus legislation that was brought forward by the government of the day and suggested it should all be broken up and dealt with issue by issue and piecemeal. It's quite interesting to see their change of heart on that legislative procedure. I suppose the reality of governing has sunk in and they realize that omnibus bills are bills that are brought forward by whoever is in power from time to time. But it creates a lot of concern for people who are interested in the bill and want to make sure that their concerns are heard.

1850

I wish I'd had more chance and opportunity to review the details of this legislation, but I only found out today

that I was going to be speaking to this bill—actually late this morning—and I'm delighted to have this chance. I just wish I'd had more chance to review the information prior to making my presentation.

I know when the minister introduced this bill back in December, he informed the House that it was his objective to ensure that the bill would provide "greater access to more health care professions, usher in a new era in public health, better protect public safety, and bring more accountability and transparency to the system." All of these goals are laudable. It remains to be seen whether or not this bill achieves those goals. With this bill, the minister went on to say, he intended to proceed with the government's agenda for what he called positive change and ensuring that the stakeholders who were interested in this bill would have a chance to ensure that their position and their views were reflected in the legislation.

This bill goes back to a day in 2004 when the Legislature unanimously decided to suspend the medical audit system in place at that time that had clearly been seen to be inadequate. The doctors were very concerned about the way it was being managed and the Legislature agreed. Supreme Court Justice Mr. Peter Cory was assigned the task of looking at the system, along with the Ontario Medical Association, and there were recommendations brought forward that allowed for the creation of a new medical review process that was intended to restore the doctors' confidence in the fairness of the audit system and provide the public with accountability for the doctors' payments. As you know, the health care budget consumes an ever greater amount of resources as a percentage of the total provincial budget. Naturally taxpayers are quite interested in how that money is being spent and they have a right to have their questions answered. Obviously we want to make sure that the system for paying doctors is fair to doctors as well as taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall, because you served in this Legislature in 2003, the tragedy of the SARS crisis that affected our province that year. We know that we've got to learn the lessons that we developed through the SARS crisis and ensure that our system is ready if indeed we face another public health emergency. Hopefully, we will not, but certainly having gone through that experience, it is prudent that the government prepares its processes and systems in case we are faced with another crisis of that sort.

If you listen to the experts in public health, we're often told that a pandemic of flu is a certainty at some point in the future, similar to something we've experienced in recent years from time to time—hopefully not as serious and severe as the Spanish flu outbreak that occurred throughout the world around the end of World War I. But really, if we listen to the public health experts, we need to be prepared for the possibility of a public health emergency like a flu pandemic that we have experienced a number of times in the 20th century. This bill is intended, as I understand it, to try to make sure that we are prepared.

The bill would establish the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, as I've said. This independent agency, modeled on the Centers for Disease Control, would bring together academic, clinical and government experts to create a centre of public health excellence in Ontario. This is something of a positive reform that I believe we need in the province of Ontario.

The bill is intended to expand the scope of practice for optometrists, for dental hygienists and for pharmacists, and patients would have increased access to services through the safe and appropriate use of these health care providers. This aspect of the legislation is based on recommendations that came to the government from the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, or HPRAC as we call it when we want to abbreviate that long title.

When this bill was first introduced, our party's critic, the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, had the opportunity to very briefly respond. She expressed concerns about the omnibus nature of this bill and whether or not sufficient consultation had taken place. She also observed that the bill was being introduced in the Legislature nine months from the election. So we're questioning why it took the government this long if they are so sincerely interested in proceeding with this piece of legislation, as they say they are, as a high priority. Why would it have taken more than three years before this bill would see the light of day and be introduced in this Legislature if indeed the government thinks it's such a high priority?

She also made reference to the Cory report and suggested that the government was remiss in not responding to it sooner, and she talked about the fact that we don't have enough health professionals in Ontario. I know, listening to her through the years, that she is constantly advocating for the idea of ensuring that there is a health care human resources plan so that in the coming years we ensure that we have sufficient numbers of doctors, nurses and all the other ranges of health professionals. Obviously, if we don't have sufficient numbers of health professionals, we can't provide the care that people need and that people have come to expect, and rightly so.

If you look at the numbers, at the information I've seen in recent months about the average age of the doctors who are currently practising in Ontario, as that group of doctors comes close to retirement or decides to semi-retire perhaps and reduce their patient caseload, and if you think of the number of baby boomers as they get into their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s, the demand on the health system in the coming years is going to be absolutely phenomenal. We have to ensure that we have the health system in place to meet that demand. That's why I think our party is quite right to be advocating innovative reforms as opposed to taking an ideological approach in terms of planning for the future health care system that we're going to need.

I would like to also mention a few concerns that I've heard in my riding about health care generally, this being an opportunity to debate health issues. Reviewing the minister's speech from when he introduced this bill on

December 12 and listening to his speech last night: He was quite willing to talk about some of the positive things that he feels his government has accomplished. There are obviously a number of concerns that I want to bring forward tonight as a representative on behalf the people of Waterloo–Wellington.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think as well as I do, that health care consistently in recent years has been the number one concern of Ontario residents. The public opinion pollsters who do this kind of thing find, when they take polls, that in almost every poll that's done, health care rates as the number one concern. I think people rightly expect the health care system to be there for them when they need it; not tomorrow, not a month from now, not weeks from now, not a year from now. They expect it to be there for them and their family and their neighbours and their friends when they need it.

In the last couple of days, we've had interesting questions in the Ontario Legislature about the issue of knee replacements. Of course, it has been highlighted that the Don Mills Surgical Unit has brought forward a proposal to the Minister of Health which would indicate their willingness to provide knee replacement surgery at a cost of about \$1,000 less per knee than is currently expended in the public system. From what we understand, the Minister of Health, having received the submission, the recommendations, and having the Ministry of Health study them, responded a few days ago by saying that there was absolutely no way they were going to work with this hospital to provide these kinds of services—cheaper than what they cost in the public system—just taking an ideological approach and rejecting the proposal out of hand.

I think that people who are waiting for knee replacement surgery would find that information to be disappointing, to say the least. In some cases, it would make them very heartsick to know that the government was unwilling to cut the waiting list significantly for them and allow them to receive the surgery they need through an Ontario hospital, albeit a privately owned one, even though this hospital is given approval to provide cataract surgery as well as other procedures where they are funded out of the OHIP system.

Our position as a party has been to be prepared to look at these kinds of proposals pragmatically, not ideologically. If we can be assured that a resident of Ontario would be able to pay for this service with their OHIP card, not with their credit card, that is something that the government should be prepared to consider.

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It's interesting that in other provinces there have been steps taken in this direction: in British Columbia and Alberta, and according to today's *Globe and Mail* in the province of Manitoba. Of course, as we know, Manitoba is governed by an NDP government, Gary Doer, and yet the province of Manitoba has seen fit to take this step and go in this direction. The government has been remiss in being unwilling to at least take a good, hard look at this proposal, and we will hear more about this issue in the coming days, would be my expectation.

In my riding of Waterloo–Wellington, we are well served by a number of community hospitals and very fortunate to have the Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Fergus. As you know, because I've been raising this in the Legislature for a long time, there is a proposal in the Fergus area for a new hospital for the residents in the catchment area of the Groves Memorial Community Hospital.

We have been working on this project for a long time now. The community was encouraged to raise funds toward the new hospital and, over a period of a very short time, actually, \$15 million was raised toward the hospital renewal project as it existed at that time—\$15 million raised in terms of pledges and cash in the bank towards what was then a \$30-million hospital redevelopment proposal. In recent months, the hospital has reconsidered its proposal and is now in the process of making plans for building a brand new hospital on a greenfield site, so it would be a brand new hospital.

But the concern and frustration I have as the MPP for Waterloo–Wellington is the multi-layered approval process within the Ministry of Health before allowing our hospital to move forward. It is extremely frustrating when you know the need exists, you know the community is growing, you know the demand for the service exists and you know how strongly supported the hospital is because of the good work that's done and has been done through the years, and will be in the future.

Why it takes years for approvals to move to the next stage of approval for hospital redevelopment is beyond me. I can't understand it. I can't accept it. I believe that, unfortunately, the Ministry of Health from time to time uses these approval processes as a reason for delay, an excuse for delay, and that's not acceptable to my constituents, nor is it acceptable to me. I'm going to continue to advocate for this. I believe that the government needs to expedite this project and allow us to build the new hospital as soon as possible, obviously. That's what I will continue to push for.

We also are served in Waterloo–Wellington by a community hospital in Palmerston, which is called the Palmerston and District Hospital. About two years ago, working in partnership and co-operation with the Grand River Hospital in Kitchener, the Ministry of Health announced that there would be a satellite dialysis clinic built in north Wellington, and it was decided it would be in Palmerston. That has been announced for more than two years.

Around Christmastime I received information from a patient in my area, a woman named Lisa Mitton, who had written a letter to the editor expressing her concern about the delays in terms of the establishment of this satellite dialysis service that had been promised by the government two years before. She wrote the letter to me, but she also copied the letter to a significant number of our local newspapers, which printed it.

I took that as a signal that I needed to directly raise this issue with the government. I made a number of efforts to communicate the urgency of this project to the

government, and we were pleased a couple of weeks ago when the government finally gave its approval that was needed to allow the hospital in Palmerston to move forward. But it was very disappointing and discouraging because we had been told that it looked good for announcement before the end of the year and that there was no reason why it wouldn't happen before then.

More than two months passed after it should have been done and, again, every month of delay to these patients who need dialysis services but have to drive long, long distances for the service is obviously a wasted period of time. Again, it points to the need for greater efforts on the part of the government to expedite these approval processes so as to allow patients to have the opportunity to have these services closer to home.

In closing, because my time is now limited, I will re-emphasize the key points that our caucus is putting forward with respect to this bill. We are concerned that the omnibus bill, amending 42 separate acts, has the potential to involve the largest number of stakeholders ever on any bill. As such, the government must give a great deal of time for us to debate this bill and to allow the bill to be sent to committee and ensure that there is sufficient time for groups to have their opportunity to have their say. Hopefully, the government will listen and the bill will be made stronger as a result of the committee hearings.

Our caucus is quite concerned that the McGuinty Liberals waited until nine months before their planned election, which of course is on October 10 of this year, to introduce a bill that needs and requires adequate public consultations, as I said.

Our caucus is very concerned that Ontario's social workers have been excluded from the regulation of psychotherapy in the initial proposed act as it stands. I know the government has signalled its intention to create an amendment, but obviously that isn't going to happen until we go to committee, and then we'll have to see if in fact the government intention as stated is honoured through that amendment. We do find it surprising that the Liberal government did not adopt the recommendations of HPRAC, the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, in this regard in the initial drafting of the bill, since this exclusion could seriously impact access to mental health services.

Thank you very much for listening to me. I look forward to the debate on this tonight, and I'm hoping that the minister will take close, careful note of the comments from the opposition.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): It was interesting to listen to the member from Wellington—

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Waterloo.

Mr. Bisson: Waterloo-Wellington. I don't have the riding name in front of me. I'm sorry.

I just want to say that it's one of those bills where there are lots and lots of different things being done because in its very nature it's a bit of an omnibus bill—I would say probably more than just a little bit—and it

deals with a whole bunch of different amendments to various acts, everything from the Ambulance Act to the Health Professions Act and others. I'm going to have an opportunity, in about another 10 minutes or so, to get through some of the things I would like to see dealt with in this bill because it gives us an opportunity to get at some of the things that probably need to be changed; for example, and I'll talk about this a little bit later, the whole issue of being able to enhance the scope of practice for various regulated health professions, because we find ourselves increasingly in more difficulty finding physicians to care for people in the province of Ontario. And that's not a problem that's unique to Ontario; it's a problem in a whole bunch of places. But I think one of the solutions is to look at how we're able to use other health care professionals more effectively. For example, a nurse practitioner is able to do a lot of the work that is normally done by doctors. We need to take a look at how we're able to enhance their scope of practice so they're able to do more, and allow doctors to do the more complex work that they're really trained to do. That's one of the things that I want to talk about a little bit later.

I also want to talk about some of the things that I think we need to do to deal with making the job of the person doing the diagnosing a little bit easier, and this is something I've been talking about to a lot of physicians across northern Ontario. I'll talk about that a little later and I'm going to have a couple of suggestions that possibly we can put into the amendments to the Health Insurance Act to try to make their job easier but also probably to help us save a little bit of money in the system.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It's a great pleasure to enter this debate and take a couple of minutes to talk about some of the comments the member from Waterloo-Wellington brought to the floor. One of the things I want to comment on—it's not so much about the bill but about how we do business. One of the comments was that he'd like to see consultation. It is, I guess, frustrating because I know I wasn't here during the last government, but it certainly was well publicized about the lack of consultation. With any piece of legislation they brought forward, they just ruled the roost and there really was no consultation. I want to reassure the member that I'm sure the Minister of Health has a lot of expectation to have consultation, to have lots of input, because that's the way this side of the House has conducted business over the last three and a half years. So I want to reassure him.

A little bit about the comments about what this piece of legislation does: Yes, it is comprehensive. Yes, there are a lot of loose ends that we need to deal with. One of the things coming from rural Ontario was the fact that the testing of water systems—churches and small community centres—under the legislation we had before was through a heavy regulatory process, very expensive. We listened. We're going to hand that back to the health units, which we're very fortunate to have in our areas, very accessible. Certainly one of the things that I hear from the folks in my riding just on that piece alone is that we are bringing it back to where it should be, to make sure that the folks

in all of Ontario, not just rural Ontario, have access to those services that are affordable and protect their health.

I'm looking forward to further debate. I know we are going in the right direction and I hope we all co-operate and get this piece of legislation passed through.

1910

Mr. O'Toole: It's always a pleasure to respond to the member from Waterloo-Wellington, who works very closely with our critic for the Ministry of Health, the honourable Elizabeth Witmer.

What troubles me is, first, that it's an omnibus bill. Secondly, it's about health, the most important policy area for the people in the riding that I represent, Durham, as well as Ontario. This being an omnibus bill, I'm just going to bring up—I will be speaking for an hour probably on this bill sometime in the future, but let's just look at one part here. The member from Waterloo-Wellington mentioned schedule A, one little subsection. "Subsection 19(2)"—the people of Ontario need to know—"of the act sets out the persons who are entitled to share personal health information." Now we are into the substance of the bill, tinkering with my constituents' health information. We're talking under schedule A. This is just one of 17 schedules—a huge omnibus bill. And the very first section is talking about "without the consent of the individual."

I'd like to talk to Ann Cavoukian, our health information and privacy commissioner, about just this first schedule A—very, very sensitive. Stay tuned because I'll tell you that "the sharing of personal health information permitted under subsection 19(2) may occur for purposes related to the provision of communication services" back to the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, you should know that under the health privacy concerns is informed consent, implied consent. It seems that the minister is taking the instructions from—as they will do—the bully bill kind of thing that's here before us and forcing people to disclose information that's sacred to them—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm delighted to rise and comment on the comments of my colleague to the north from Waterloo-Wellington. He's certainly been talking about some of the issues that present themselves in our neighbourhood. I too was quite delighted to hear recently that the satellite dialysis clinic in Palmerston will be going ahead, because I know that's very important to the people of north Wellington.

This bill is a very interesting bill in the sense that it covers a lot of territory. In some ways it's a very challenging bill because it does cover a lot of different things, but there are a number of things in here that have been quite interesting issues around this House for the last few years.

One of the issues is the recognition of a college for dental hygienists. That's been something that one of our members in fact had a private member's bill on. You may remember that Minister Cansfield, when she was a pri-

vate member, actually had a private member's bill which had a lot of broad support on that issue. So I'm pleased that that is now going forward as part of a government bill and will in fact, we hope, after this has gone through the appropriate public consultation and second and third reading, become part of the law of the land.

In addition to that, we're establishing an agency for health protection and promotion. In the context of some of the very serious disease outbreaks that we've seen in Ontario over the last decade, it's very important that we increase our capacity to do that, and the Ontario agency for health protection will be doing just that.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Waterloo-Wellington, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Arnott: I want to express my appreciation to the member for Timmins-James Bay from the NDP, the member from Northumberland from the government caucus, the member from Durham from the Progressive Conservative opposition caucus and the member for Guelph-Wellington, my neighbour to the south, again from the government caucus.

I would offer my view that this bill is exceedingly complex as an omnibus piece of legislation. I do have a copy of the bill in my hand. It's 141 pages—143 pages, I should say.

Interjection.

Mr. Arnott: And, yes, quite hefty and heavy. No question about it. All the more reason that this underscores the need for extensive public hearings. While many of the aspects of this bill are things that we will probably be supporting in principle, in terms of ensuring that we get the bill right, this is an important bill that has to be given its due process at committee.

Unfortunately, when the House is sitting and committees are sitting concurrently, it's very difficult for committees to travel, as you know. So if indeed the bill is referred to committee while the House is sitting, which is most likely going to be the case, it's going to be very difficult for the committee to travel. So we're not going to receive as many pieces of advice from people in their own communities as committees do when the House is in recess. For example, when we're doing pre-budget consultations in the month of January, the finance committee is able to travel all over the province. This is the concern. I think the committee is going to have an important challenge to ensure that everybody across the province who has an idea or a view with respect to this bill will be given the chance to present. I hope that the committee will be prepared to consider teleconferencing and other innovative ways to ensure that people from all corners of the province will be given the opportunity to make a presentation on this bill, not just the people who live in Toronto.

With that, I'll conclude my remarks. I look forward to this debate, and I hope the government listens to the remarks of the opposition.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Bisson: As I was saying before Christmas, before this House rose—

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: I've always wanted to do that. Anyway, I want to take this opportunity—because this is an omnibus bill. It's one of those bills that is like the mother of all bills within the Ministry of Health and it makes amendments to all kinds of pieces of legislation. It gives us an opportunity to talk, in a more broad sense, in regards to health issues from the ridings that we represent and also speaks specifically to some of the sections of the bill.

The first thing I want to really get into, because I've only got 20 minutes and I'm going to try to do this as coherently as possible, is to talk about some of the special challenges that we face in places like northern Ontario, and I would argue in places like southwestern Ontario, in regards to delivering health care services to people in our communities. First of all, Ontario—it has to be said; it's an understatement—is a very big province. Lots of geography. People are spread from one part of the province to the other. When you start driving around Ontario—and I'm not talking about just driving from Toronto to Barrie, but I'm talking about driving from Cornwall to Kenora—you start to get a sense of just how big this place is. When you have such a large province, there are very specific challenges that are facing us as legislators, as the Minister of Health and as the government, to be able to respond to the need for health care services of the people who live in those communities. For me, I want to speak about the special challenges that we have in northern Ontario.

One of the issues that we have—it's the case in many cases—is the whole issue of the lack of physicians. Now, I'm going to say, every government—ours, the previous and this one—has done things to try to address the shortage of physicians. This is not throwing the ball to one side of the House or the other, but everybody has done something to try to assist in dealing with trying to curb the issue—

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Minister, I'm trying to be non-partisan and you're starting to heckle me. Come on, I'm trying to be nice to you tonight. What a guy. Just unbelievable, being heckled by the minister.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): Don't be nice. I told you not to be nice.

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Mr. Bisson: I know. Michael, I gave you that advice years ago, didn't I?

I want to say that one of the special challenges we have is the lack of physicians. It's one that's particularly difficult to deal with in smaller, rural and northern parts of Ontario, because it's very hard to attract a physician to come to work in a community of 3,000 or 4,000 people.

I think that one of the things we need to look at is how we can better use health care providers who are currently in the system practising in whatever particular profession they may be in. For example, how do we use nurses better; how do we use nurse practitioners; how do we use physiotherapists? How do we use all of those people more effectively so that we can lessen the burden and the

load on doctors, so that doctors are able to deal with more complex cases and leave the less complex—and I would say they're far more complex than I understand—to other people who are properly trained?

I'll speak to, first of all, nurse practitioners very quickly. I have a bit of an interest in this. My daughter is a nurse practitioner practising up in the city of Timmins, and I know from talking to her and some of her colleagues—there was a health care forum held by CBC Radio in Sudbury about two weeks ago that I attended, and one of the messages that came from a lot of people there is that we need to look at how we can expand the scope of service for people who are currently practising within the field of nurse practitioners. We need to take a look at how we're able to get them to prescribe more medicines and do a lot of the things that doctors are currently doing that they're quite properly trained to be able to do. If there's a question of additional training, there are certainly ways that we're able to address that in our training system. If we were able to do that, it would lessen the load on doctors and allow us to use nurse practitioners more effectively. Conversely, with the question of nurses themselves and others within the health system, we need to do similar things so that the people who are basically the front-line workers are better able to deal with the various situations that they come in contact with in the health care system so that—you'll always need doctors, and God knows we've got to keep on going in that direction—we're able to use those other people in the health care field more effectively. I think that's one of the things that we need to look at.

I've had an opportunity to talk to a number of pharmacists because of another bill that was before the House that pharmacists have not been too happy with, and one of the interesting things that they've pointed out to me is that there's a lot of work that pharmacists are doing now and could do better, being able to divert people away from emergency rooms and doctors' offices—a person walks in to the pharmacist with a condition that a pharmacist is properly able to deal with by providing the proper medication off the shelf to the person who walks in.

I was speaking to one of the pharmacists in Sudbury at this health care forum—and I forget the gentleman's name. He pointed out that he had decided to pay special attention to what he did as one pharmacist in that pharmacy in one day, as far as how many people he feels he was able to divert from having to go to a doctor's office or having to go to an emergency ward. In his particular situation, he was saying, "I know there are at least eight people I have come in contact with today to whom I have been able to say, on the floor, 'Here is something off the shelf that is able to help you. If it gets any worse, then go see your physician,'" and those people properly took that, went away, and by and large didn't have to go to the emergency ward or didn't have to go to the doctor's office.

My point is that we have to properly utilize everybody in the health care system so that we can lessen the load

that is on our emergency services, our health clinics and doctors' offices and emergency wards, so that in the end you go there only if you're really sick and that's the last resort. So I think we need to look at how we can better use pharmacists, nurse practitioners, nurses and others in the system to be able to do that.

The other thing is that we need to do what we can, especially in communities that are underserved as far as doctors, to expand community health centres.

I had the privilege last Friday of opening the Kapuskasing health centre that just opened its doors last Friday. I think they took their first patient, actually, on Monday of this week. I want to commend the Minister of Health, Mr. Smitherman, for having funded that, because that was an application that had been before the Ministry of Health for a long time. I think two or three requests for funding had been turned down. I want to publicly say that Mr. Smitherman certainly heard the call from the organizers in the community who were on the board that put together the application for funding. When I raised it with him a couple of years ago he certainly understood that in a community like Kapuskasing, where you do have a problem of lack of doctors, health clinics can play a very positive role in trying to deal with people who don't have family doctors, but more importantly, as well being able to divert people who would normally end up at the emergency ward because they've got nowhere to go because they don't have a doctor. That's one of the other realities.

I want to again, for the record, say to the minister that the community of Kapuskasing thanks you. We think that was an excellent initiative. We're quite happy that your government and you as minister have seen your way fit to fund it. You know me. I'm not shy coming into this House and throwing barbs at the government. I'm not shy going after you guys when you're doing things that I think come between the better good of the people of northern Ontario. But when you do something right, I think it's also incumbent upon me to say you've done something right. You can't just be throwing stones at a government. I think you have to, when a government does something well, say thank you. In this particular case, on behalf of Mayor Al Spacek, on behalf of the organizing committee and certainly the citizens of Kapuskasing and the area, we want to thank the minister and the government for having funded that community health centre. That's going to make a huge difference in the community of Kapuskasing.

Going back to the issue of being able to deal with the whole situation around how to better serve constituents when it comes to being able to provide services, we need to provide alternative methods for people to access services so that they don't always have to go running into the emergency ward. Again, that's the case certainly in the city of Timmins with the Misiway health centre. I want to thank the minister a second time tonight—there's something wrong here; maybe I fell off the turnip truck or something. But recently we had some issues at the Misiway centre that took some intervention on the part of the minister. In dealing with his able staff person, Scott

Lovell, whom I want to thank as well, because Scott played a very large role in this, when they asked for my advice about what it is, basically I clued him in to what the problem was. The minister's office was very responsive in, first of all, finding out there was a problem and trying to find a solution, and at the end of the day I want to again thank the minister for having intervened on behalf of the community and the James Bay Cree people by being able to respond to the difficulties we're having at Misiway and creating the kind of link that we did between Weeneebayko General Hospital and the Misiway centre. I've got to say that in the conversations I've had with people since, they also send their thanks on that particular file.

The fit there is a good one because James Bay, which is part of my riding of Timmins-James Bay, as everybody knows, is populated by Mushkegowuk Cree, and many of the Cree come into Timmins and decide to live there because it's closer to health services and sometimes jobs, family members or whatever it might be. The Misiway health centre is basically one of the primary means by which the Mushkegowuk Cree who are living in Timmins, which is quite a sizable population, are able to access health care services by way of doctors, nurses and others who work inside that health centre. It is a very good fit, I think. We've tried to make this connection between the James Bay and Timmins by allowing a restructuring to happen at Misiway with the help of Weeneebayko General Hospital and the James Bay General Hospital on the James Bay, which are currently going through a process of integration to be able to re-establish themselves and to connect the links that I think we need to have with the James Bay, because we're servicing the same people.

My point is that those are good examples—the use of health centres, the utilization of other health care professionals to be able to dispense health services—of a sane way of providing services and not having to pay for the most expensive option, which is the option that some people unfortunately have to choose because there is no other option in their community, and that is to go to an emergency ward.

I want to talk about one of the things that has been raised with me by a number of doctors. I've not had an opportunity to put this on the floor of the Legislature, and if you'll permit me I'm going to do it by way of this legislation, and it actually fits in well. A number of doctors I've talked to over the last couple of years talk about one of the difficulties they often have, especially in communities that are underserved where you have orphaned patients, when a person walks in the door of their practice as a doctor in their doctor's office, in the medical clinic or in the emergency ward and they've never seen this patient before. They have no idea who this person is, possibly other than having seen him on the street. The point is, they have no medical records on him. Part of the problem is that at times when they're trying to diagnose, the doctor or the health care professional, whoever that might be, needs to have information in regard to

the person's medical history as far as what medications they're taking, what their current conditions are, what the family histories are etc. so that when they're doing their diagnosis of the person, especially if the person is incapacitated, they are better able to come to a quick diagnosis that is to the core of whatever the medical crisis is at the time. One of the things doctors have said is that in this day of electronic databases, we need to find a way of centralizing all the testing information and medical records so we're able to access it in a way that respects the privacy of the patient but at the same time allows the doctor to see the history of the patient so the doctor or the nurse practitioner or whomever is better able to make a diagnosis and, in the end, probably save money.

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The example I'm given by some is that a person will walk into a family health clinic in the city of Timmins, for example, to see a doctor for a condition and will be prescribed a blood test and whatever other tests need to be done to try to determine the person's situation. The person then goes to the emergency ward a couple of days later and the same tests are done again, at double the cost. And sometimes they end up in their own family doctor's office, because maybe the doctor was away on holiday, and has the tests done a third time. Well, think about it. We're spending a lot of money to do tests that have already been done. Now, I understand that a doctor often may want to double-check something, and we can't make it so bureaucratic that the doctor or the nurse practitioner is unable to do his or her job in terms of testing somebody.

My point, and what doctors have said to me, is that we need to have something that allows us to share medical records and the tests that have been done and their results in some central database so that if a patient walks in, in Kapuskasing, Timmins or Toronto, the doctor or attending physician or whoever the caregiver might be is able to look at the person's medical record and determine that they have high blood pressure or that their blood sugar level is up or whatever so they're better able to care for the patient. At the same time, that would save the system money by not needlessly sending somebody out for the same test because you don't know that test has been done.

The question I've asked a number of physicians who have raised this with me is, "Why don't you ask the patient in the first place?" They say, "We do, but most patients don't understand what we've sent them to be tested for and have no idea, if they've gone for a blood test, whether they were testing for sugar or for whatever else within the blood." So first of all, most patients wouldn't know, and second, some patients just may not want to say, because some want to go to multiple places to get checked by different people because that's just the way they are.

So a number of doctors have said that to be able to save the system some money, but more importantly, to allow them to better diagnose, they need to have a system where there's some sort of central database where all that

information is so we have a good record on the patient so they're better able to care.

One of the simple ideas put forward by a couple of docs I was talking to earlier this fall was that it might be as simple as a health passport, as one doctor called it. You'd have a document that the doctor fills out: Every time you see a doctor or you're in the emergency ward or whatever, you're asked for your passport, and the doctor or the attending physician or the nurse practitioner writes, "In on this date for whatever; came in for the flu. Was diagnosed the following medication." There's a page of medications that have been prescribed and pages where the doctor writes very quickly what the person has been treated for, so at least the doctor has a clue when the person walks in.

It seems to me that makes ultimate sense. I'm not sure how to put it together. I don't pretend to be the person who would design something like this. All I know is that it makes infinite sense to try to find some way of centralizing medical records in such a way that we protect people's privacy but allow physicians and others to do a better job of being able to diagnose.

The other thing I want to talk about very quickly is the whole issue of long-term care. Look around this room. Many of us, if we're lucky, 30 or 40 years from now may need to be in a long-term-care facility. Many of us, the baby boomers in our 50s and 60s, will eventually, if we're lucky, end up living that long and possibly have to go into a long-term-care facility. One of things that I think we're all seeing across Ontario—you laugh, but it's true.

Mr. Prue: No. I'm laughing because you're talking about me.

Mr. Bisson: See—the camera over there—he's older than me. I'm the young pup. I'm only 49.

Anyway, we're all going to have to do a better job on this particular end. Everybody in government has tried to approach this in different ways. Many governments have tried to do things that have had positive effects, but I fear we're not keeping up with what needs to be done. Simply put—and I think the minister will agree with me—a couple of things are really important.

First of all, we need to make sure we have proper community supports. The first option should always be for somebody to live at home independently, with adequate support so they can live semi-independently within their home by dispatching services from the community care access centre, nursing or personal care or whatever it might be. But one of the things we see is that many of the services we need to assist people to live more independently are very difficult to get in some communities. It might be as simple as having somebody do the groceries because a person is housebound, especially in the winter months. It might be as simple as having somebody come in and do—well, we already do housekeeping in some communities, but in some places we don't do it as well as in others. So we need to provide the types of support a person needs to live at home.

The second step that I believe we have to have is transitional housing. We really need to have apartment-

style complexes that have some services built within the apartment complex. If I'm living at home and I'm no longer able to live with the services of the CCAC, I could move into an apartment building where there are full-time staff there to tend to some of the needs I will have in those later years, or if I'm younger and have a condition where I'm not able to live alone. It might be some personal care, it might be helping me to get out to pay the bills and do the groceries and all those things. It would enable me, especially when I have a crisis—and that happens. Often, when you're a lot older, in your 80s or 90s, you might be okay for two or three months, but all of a sudden you have two or three bad weeks and you cannot live at home independently. You might be able to live at home in an apartment building if you had some sort of transitional housing.

The last part is that we do need to invest in our long-term-care facilities. One of things that I see in all of the long-term-care facilities—the Golden Manor in Timmins certainly, the Extendicares and others—is that they're having a tough time trying to make ends meet. There are not enough beds in the system. In the city of Timmins, we often find ourselves with alternative-level-of-care patients inside the hospital who cannot be discharged into the community because their needs are too great to be supported in the community, and they find themselves having to stay in the hospital because there is no long-term-care bed to put them in. Certainly in the city of Timmins we have that problem. I call on my good friend the Minister of Health to sign a cheque soon to assist us in putting in some beds at the Golden Manor so we're better able to provide for the needs of the people of Timmins.

Those are some of the issues I raise in this debate. I look forward to comments from the members in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I am pleased to comment on the debate presented by the member for Timmins-James Bay. I agree that this is a very complex bill. I also want to add my thanks to my constituents who have talked to me about this bill, on both sides of the issue.

Essentially, as the member from Timmins-James Bay said, it is about trying to deliver health services to our areas, such as rural Ontario and the north, where it's more complicated to do so. With this bill, we are going to do exactly that. We want to provide to the people of this province greater access to all the health professions.

In rural Ontario, where we have a shortage of doctors and there is difficulty sometimes in recruiting, we lean very much on professions and professionals such as midwives, nurse practitioners and pharmacists, who help us to keep our doctors available for those issues they can best spend their resources on. Having been a chair and a member of a hospital board, I know the value that other professions give to the health care system. I've always been a real proponent of midwifery. As the mother of five, having had five very healthy pregnancies, I have felt

that, as in Europe, we would use the hospital only for those situations where there is difficulty in the pregnancy. Pregnancy is a very natural process and a very healthy process, and midwives are quite capable. In situations such as in rural and northern Ontario, we welcome midwives into the system. We think they're a very important part of the kinds of health care services that we can provide.

We look the same way at nurse practitioners. In my particular area, nurse practitioners have been a real boon to the medical profession. They allow the doctors to concentrate on those critical situations, on those acute files, while they take care of the situations of the healthy baby, the temperatures, the colds, that sort of thing.

One thing that happened in my community, that I think happens in all communities, is that people have to get used to that. They need to get used to the idea that they don't need to see the doctor for everything, that there are professions that will help them achieve the same results. You talked about pharmacists and nurse practitioners, and I agree with you on that.

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Mr. O'Toole: Bill 171, as I said earlier, is so important. First, the qualification is that this bill must go to committee. I've heard the minister off the record tonight that it will. I wouldn't want to presume anything, because he is in fact in charge. I respect that. But there are 17 schedules, 145 pages amending 40-some different acts—very complex, technical and important changes to a health care system that we all support. Certainly our leader, John Tory, has made it known that—I spoke earlier on schedule A, the health privacy issues raised there, in terms of who sees what information about whom. But schedule B—the health professions themselves, the stakeholders there, the Regulated Health Professions Act—is extremely important in terms of the nuances of changing scope of practice. These colleges and the regulators will have many voices—competing voices, I might say—on the issue of scope of practice: the nurses, nurse practitioners, RPNs and pharmacists may have something to say on this.

It's interesting to look at schedule D, a very important schedule. This one has to do with water systems. It's part of the Bill 43 problem they have in terms of who regulates what water system. They're kind of decanting it from the Minister of the Environment, Ms. Broten. It may be appropriate to shed some of that liability there, but they're really basically downloading this function to the municipalities.

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): No.

Mr. O'Toole: Well, they are, in fact, because there's no money involved. I sat on the cabinet community on energy and the environment and we knew the cost to be exorbitant. The amount of money they put into that one small piece is problematic.

But there is more to be said on schedule D and the others, A to Q. This is a complex piece and needs a lot of debate.

Mr. Prue: It was a pleasure, as always, to listen to my good colleague from Timmins–James Bay. But he did something tonight which I too rarely see in this House, and perhaps it's a little refreshing to hear him actually do it, and that is to commend a government when it has done something right. I wish we could hear a little bit more of that. Conversely, I wish sometimes we could hear a little bit more of a government admitting when they have done something wrong. That would be a very refreshing change.

But it was very good to hear him talk of the success that has happened in Kapuskasing and the success that is happening around the whole issue of nurse practitioners. To my way of thinking, that is an idea whose time has definitely come. Where we're having a shortage of doctors, a dearth in some communities, it is a good idea to provide alternatives, and it appears that these are alternatives that are working in Kapuskasing and in the north that need to be further explored. I would echo his sentiments. I didn't know about them until he actually spoke, but I have no reason to doubt what he is saying. If what he said is true, then the minister should be commended, and I'll be the second one tonight.

To go on, though, he went on to talk about the north. We need to understand, those of us from southern Ontario—people like myself who get up once or twice a year to that beautiful part of the province, that far too few Ontarians and far too Canadians have a chance to see—that it is a long distance between houses and it's a longer distance between communities. Some of them are so incredibly isolated that I commend him for the many times he stands in this Legislature and talks about the unique problems that so many of us are unaware of.

He closed with long-term-care facilities, and we'll talk about that some more.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I'm also delighted to join in the debate on Bill 171, introduced by our good friend the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. For all the people watching tonight, the Minister of Health is here for this debate, taking notes about the things being raised in the debate, as a good minister should. We do appreciate the fact that he's participating.

I want to say to my friend from the Beaches, if we're being complimentary, that last night we had a wonderful debate about the child advocate, and there were some amendments suggested by the NDP that I think the government has found very constructive and we're looking forward to taking that bill into committee and working together collegially on that. There are some things that transcend partisan politics: obviously, the child advocate, and a bill like this.

I commend the minister, particularly for his vision around making sure we can have critical care ambulances to support our critical care air ambulances, that very important juncture, that we're putting sufficient provincial resources into making sure we have that kind of care.

I want to talk about my good friend Dr. Susan Tamblin, the former medical officer of health in the Perth district health unit, who really has world-class

renown on the whole question of public health and infectious diseases. I know she was in the trenches when our province had to fight SARS. I know she is now doing some work for public health. I've had many discussions with her about Justice Campbell's report. I know she would be happy about the establishment of the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion.

I want to say briefly that I appreciate the work and the message received by the social workers in my riding who came to see me. I commend the minister for taking their advice and offering the amendment, which I think is significant. It is all about building a team. That is our vision, and I want to commend the minister for the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Timmins–James Bay, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Bisson: I want to thank all the members for their kind comments. I'd just say in closing, in the last two minutes, that health care, especially—we all agree—public health care, has become almost sacrosanct in terms of what people expect from the government. If government identifies itself with any particular issue that touches people in an almost unimaginable way, it's our system of public health care.

One of the challenges we have is that if we all want to keep public health care, we have to figure out how we're going to make it run more efficiently and more effectively each and every day that we run the system. I argue that it's better than most systems out there that I've seen. I've traveled around the world; I've been to Asia, Africa, South America, Europe, and not a lot of places come close to providing the health services that we get in Ontario and generally in Canada.

However, that being said, we can't just stand back and say, "Oh, we've got the best system in the world, so therefore we don't have to do anything." We need to constantly try to figure out ways of making the system work better. I think one of the ways we do that is to challenge the people within the system and we here in the Legislature to really think about how we can deliver services in a more effective manner and at the best possible price. I argue that it has to be done in a public system. We have opportunities to think about innovative ways of providing those services, and I spoke about that a little tonight. We need to do a better job of figuring out how to use all the people in the health care system as part of the solution to provide people the services we need—everybody from pharmacists to nurses to nurse practitioners to physiotherapists, all of them. All have a role to play with doctors to provide that service.

I want to thank those members who commented on my speech. I look forward to other comments that will be made in this debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): I'm very please to rise and speak today about Bill 171. I just want to let you know, Mr. Speaker, and all the people watching TV tonight that I'm also going to be supporting this bill. But I want to talk about why I'm going to be doing that.

I believe this is an extension of the direction we have gone in the family health team. We recognize that it takes a team approach. To provide an effective health care system, we must go forward with a team approach. What we must do is to ensure that all of our professional health care providers have the ability to provide the service that they are trained for, to maximize the capacity.

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We could talk about the optometrists for just one minute, the training that they take through university. It's a very extensive training process. What more can they do to maximize their training for the people of Ontario? How does that then mesh with our other health care professionals?

And before I get into the actual details of the bill, one of the things I wanted to talk about was some of the positive things that are happening in the most beautiful riding in the province of Ontario, that being Huron-Bruce. I want to thank the Minister of Health, the Honourable George Smitherman, for coming in. Less than a month ago, the minister was in my riding to announce \$1.75 million in additional funding for redevelopment of hospitals in Exeter and Kincardine.

In addition to that, last fall the minister committed to more than \$142 million in new resources to our Ontario health care system through a three-point emergency department action plan. This funding provides a comprehensive response to the challenges that we face in Ontario emergency rooms. I can tell you that in our rural areas, it is especially challenging to provide the level of service that we want all of the people of Ontario to be able to access. Of this funding, I just want everyone to know that I have eight hospitals in my riding, and we received \$1.4 million, which I can tell you went a long way to alleviate the problems we were having in our emergency departments.

I want to just talk for a moment about other important health care initiatives undertaken by the McGuinty government. In the past four years, an overall increase in operating funding for provincial hospitals has gone from \$12.9 billion to \$14 billion in 2008-09. We've also further reduced wait times for five key health care services—hip and knee joint replacement, cataract surgeries, MRI exams, cancer surgeries, and cardiac procedures—with an investment of \$222.5 million. This funding also has helped to increase provincial medical school enrolment by 23% and was responsible for funding long-term-care homes to hire 682 new nurses.

I could go on and on through the great leadership of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Honourable George Smitherman, the longest-standing Minister of Health in the province of Ontario—

Interjections.

Mrs. Mitchell: Tallest and longest. However, I do need to speak to the important elements of Bill 171.

As I pointed out earlier, Bill 171 is a very far-reaching piece of legislation. It has the ability to correct many of the shortfalls that were previously present in our health care system. In total, the bill will affect 18 different acts

and will provide needed change to legislation such as the Ambulance Act, the Health Insurance Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act, and the Public Hospitals Act, just to name a few. As the minister has so astutely pointed out, this bill has been brought forward to ensure that we offer the people of Ontario better access to our health care professions and usher in a new era in public health in this province. We also want to better protect the health and safety of the public and bring more accountability and transparency to the system, which we feel was sadly lacking when we took office.

One of the key elements of this bill is that it introduces a new medical review process, one that will help restore the faith of Ontario doctors, a faith that has been lost by the previous method. If this legislation is enacted, the new medical audit system would be comprised of four phases: education, payment review, review by a new board, and an appeal process. This new process will emphasize the education of physicians about proper billing standards and will provide them with additional opportunities to respond to ministry concerns about their billings.

Another fundamental provision of Bill 171 is the establishment of Ontario's first-ever arm's-length public health agency, the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. This agency, in part, is in response to the SARS crisis of 2003, where 44 Ontarians were lost to the unanticipated viral outbreak. This new agency would bring top academic, clinical and government experts together to focus their efforts in the areas of infectious disease, infection control and prevention, health promotion, chronic disease and injury prevention, and environmental health.

We can pick up any paper today and this is a topic of discussion. We have to ensure that we have the proper tools in place to meet anything that comes our way. This is something that we must constantly look at, the different processes that we can go through.

This agency would provide specialized scientific and technical advice and support to government, front-line health care workers and public health units in the event of another outbreak or pandemic. There should be no argument in this province about the effect another outbreak would have after the events of the SARS crisis. The creation of this new agency is a very important step in being prepared if crisis should strike this province again. We simply cannot sit back. We must prepare and we must plan. It's something that one cannot just put on the shelf and not think about again.

Yet another positive element of this bill is the creation of four new regulated health professions in the province as per the Regulated Health Professions Act. These new regulated professions are in support of this government's HealthForceOntario human resources strategy and contribute to ensuring that Ontarians have access to safe, quality services provided by the health professions. The amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act, if passed, will include naturopathy, homeopathy, kinesiology and physiotherapy. Part of this amendment would

also include the enhancement of the services that optometrists and dental hygienists are able to provide and the enabling of pharmacists to provide more comprehensive care by way of regulating pharmacy technicians. All of these changes to the act are intended to provide patients with better access to more comprehensive services in these professions.

As a rural member, I believe that one of the most important facets—or certainly one of the facets of this bill, Bill 171—is the establishment of a small drinking water systems program. Bill 171 proposes the transfer of legislative responsibility for five categories of non-residential and seasonal residential drinking water systems from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Before I go into what the five categories include—because I know you're anxious to hear all that information—one of the things I wanted to share with you, being the member from Huron-Bruce, is that what we know a lot about are seasonal residents. When a lot of the shifting of the regulations happened with the previous government, there was no plan in place, there were no local solutions that had the ability to move forward. The cost of the water systems became so prohibitive that people were contemplating having to move away from homes that they had had in their families for generations and generations. By allowing a very responsible—our health units understand, first of all, our systems, they understand the evolution of many of the systems and how they've grown, and they will be able to apply much more of a hands-on and what I would call a user-friendly system to give people the opportunity to deal with their water systems. People today are very concerned about ensuring that the water they have is clean, safe and must be affordable. By shifting the regulatory framework to our health units, this gives the ability to apply, I would argue, a much more practical solution while ensuring the safety of our water system.

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The member from Perth-Middlesex spoke about Dr. Tamblyn and the good work that she did through the Perth health unit. I also wanted to say that Dr. Tamblyn was our medical officer of health in Huron county at one time as well.

I do want to recognize at this time Dr. Hazel Lynn from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and Dr. Beth Henning, who is our medical officer of health in Huron. These two women, I can tell you, have always been at the forefront of ensuring that public health is first and foremost in their minds, and they have certainly put their shoulder to the wheel to make our communities a better place.

I know that everyone's anxious to hear about the five categories, and I'm just going to go through those.

The first category is large municipal non-residential, such as municipally owned airports, industrial parks, sports and recreation facilities.

The second category is small municipal non-residential, such as small community centres, libraries, and sports and recreational facilities.

The third category is non-municipal seasonal residential, such as private cottages on communal drinking water systems.

Category four is large non-municipal, non-residential, such as large motels and resorts.

Category five is small non-municipal, non-residential, such as motels, restaurants, gas stations, churches, and bed and breakfasts.

These changes are in response to public consultations that indicated a preference for public health units to oversee small water drinking systems in the province.

That also leads me to the discussion. I know that the member from Waterloo-Wellington made a comment about public consultation. I just want to recognize at this time all the work that has been done by the McGuinty government to ensure that the public has a say.

I know that many of you have heard about my background many times. I was in an elected position when the Mike Harris government was in. I can tell you that public consultation was, in my opinion, a foreign word to that government. They did not consult, and I do feel that it is important.

The other thing is that not only do we consult; we listen, and then we bring it forward in recommendations, so that's why I wanted to talk about that. These changes are in direct response. The water systems, especially in rural areas and especially in seasonal areas, became such a financial hardship. What we can do, as a government, is ensure that there are safe, clean, affordable water systems available throughout all of the province of Ontario. We need to do that. We need to step up to the plate. That speaks to the consultation process. But it's not only consultation; one also has to take things into consideration. We consult, we listen, and we act, and that is what the people of Ontario expect. It has been delivered.

This proposed transfer is part of the government's commitment to ensure, as I said, that all Ontarians have continued access to safe drinking water.

The changes proposed by Bill 171 are very important to both rural and urban citizens of this province. It is my opinion that this bill will help all of Ontario's citizens by expanding the methods by which they can obtain the many health-related services offered by the Ontario government.

One of the other things that I want to talk about—and it's rather a novel approach. One of my towns, Goderich—the prettiest town in Canada—has aligned many different health care providers, such as kinesiologists, pathologists and that type of thing, in one location. I would argue that they are health care providers that you wouldn't see in what we would call a normal medical clinic practice. But they've all come together. They have done a terrific job of bringing all their businesses into one facility.

I believe that it is a formula that can apply throughout all of Ontario. I congratulate them. It's a number of young women who have chosen to go into the health care profession, but in a method that they feel, through naturopathy—that's where they wanted to get all of their know-

ledge, and it has been an extensive process for them. So congratulations to them.

The reason why they're able to do so much of this is by going to a common building. They also share a lot of resources. They have one receptionist. Once again, we're back to where I started at the beginning of my time. It's coming forward in a team approach, and that's what Bill 171 does. It talks about expanding the ability of all of our professions and making sure that we as a government give them the tools that they need for all of their training so that they are able to maximize the training that they receive and so that there are no barriers in place for that. I did want to recognize all the hard work that they have put into a new vehicle for our health care system.

I know that there's lots of work to be done; there always will be. One of the things about our health care system is that we can't take for granted that it's stagnant, because we are not doing the people of Ontario the justice that they deserve. We have to always be keeping up to how things change and what people expect of their health care system. When we talk about the pandemics and the planning and the expanded role of all the professions—this has been a very exhaustive consultation process, but I believe that it was an important part of the process in order to get to the stage where we are today. Many of the professions needed to have a higher level of understanding of what they could bring to the table as well.

If you think about it in the greater context, it's also a very nice fit with the LHINs, and that's working with all of the health sector and moving them forward to remove all the barriers. People want to be able to access our health care system through a portal. They don't have the time or the resources to be able to see a multifaceted—they constantly want things to come through one portal. By moving the health care system towards a truly integrated health care system, it becomes, to the consumer of our health care system, a much friendlier system, which then allows them the ability to maximize their own personal health care.

So this bill, I believe, is well placed and needs to move forward. As I stated at the beginning, I will be supporting this bill. It will offer the people of this province the access to the health care system that is paramount to a safe and healthy Ontario for years to come.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. O'Toole: Once again, this bill, Bill 171, the omnibus bill before us tonight, is, the more time I have to both listen and read, troublesome. I looked at the 17 different schedules here. I'm looking for one point of both compliment and observation of what it would do to the health system in Ontario.

The member was speaking from the notes prepared by the minister, no doubt, as she should. She will be supporting it because Dave Levac, the whip, told her to.

I think what's important here is critical input. I mentioned schedule A, which has to do with the releasing of private health information to people who may not be entitled to it. I've mentioned, on schedule B, that the im-

portance there is the Regulated Health Professions Act and extending some commitments to other, lesser persons that aren't prescribed under the RHPA today and under D, which is the downloading of the health regulation aspect. But E is quite troublesome. As I go through each one, I'm troubled.

I'm just going to read it: "Schedule E amends the Immunization of School Pupils Act to permit registered nurses ... to sign a statement of medical exemption under the act and to undertake other activities under the act. The amendments also permit other nurses"—RPNs, personal support workers, whatever—"to undertake certain activities under the act." You're to have the administering of a vaccination and the potential side effects, and if you go into the schedule in detail, further on, it tells you in E—it's worrisome. It exposes children to potential administered acts, health acts, that are done by other professions. Not to criticize them—probably they are competent people, but what I'm saying is, this doesn't protect us.

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Mr. Bisson: I listened to a number of the points being made. There's a whole bunch of things I can say because there was a whole bunch of different points made. But I guess where there's some agreement—and I think she's picking up a little bit on where I left off, which is the whole issue that the health care system in Ontario is a fairly complex integrated system, and any changes that are made within it—it doesn't matter at what end of the system—are going to have a repercussion effect somewhere else within it. That's the point that the member makes. So it's fairly difficult sometimes, when making the changes that need to happen within the health care system, to get it right, even when we try with our best efforts. I understand what she's getting at.

In regard to the whole other issue—and I think we again agree on this particular point—we need to look at ways to better utilize various people within the health care system to provide those services to people other than just utilizing doctors. We know that in some communities doctors are very difficult to attract. They get very, very heavy caseloads. One of the things that we need to do, other than training doctors in order to provide the number of physicians we need in the system, is to take a look at how we're able to get other health care professions to provide some of those services within the system.

The other thing is that the real big challenge is that we all agree, I would hope—anyway, I say as a New Democrat that I believe that our public system of health care is the way to go, and whatever we try to do as far as improving services has to be done in the context of a public system. But that being said, we need to also challenge ourselves in trying to figure out the best ways of being able to make the investments necessary and the changes necessary in order to make the system even better than it is today. I think that challenges all of us.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I wanted to start off by commending the member from Huron-Bruce for her comments. She spoke for about 20

minutes on Bill 171. It's not a small bill. It covers a lot of aspects regarding the health care system. Some have commented that it's an omnibus bill. When the previous government, the Tory government, was in power, they were passing omnibus bills that involved more than one area. They'd stick health care with some other area like cities or transportation, all into one huge bill and just ram it through. That's omnibus. This is dealing with one particular area, an important area, perhaps the most important area in Ontario, which is our health care system. This bill is providing this province with greater access to more health care professions, plain and simple. Yes, it is quite extensive. The member did speak to many parts of the bill, but if you're going to bring the bill into the 21st century, you've got to make changes in more than one area. There are changes being made and they're being done in various parts of various acts. The member made reference to the 18 different acts that are being looked at here. This is the way to go about modernizing our system, a system that is crucial to the well-being of our people here in Ontario.

In the last few moments that I have, I have the opportunity to introduce, from Canadian Business College, its president, Mazher Jaffery, and Alan Franklin. They are here today. They are pioneers in the education system, bringing about changes in the education system. Education is the other big area here in Ontario that we're looking at bringing about reform in. I think our government is doing a great job in both areas. I support this bill, and I support the changes.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

The member for Huron-Bruce, you have two minutes to respond.

Mrs. Mitchell: I want to thank the speakers from Durham region, Timmins-James Bay and Scarborough Southwest. I'm going to take just a short time to make comments to them.

To the member from Durham region, I know that the health care system that your side of the House shares and the health care system, the vision, that we share over here, maybe are two worlds apart.

Interjection.

Mrs. Mitchell: Thank you. To the member from Timmins-James Bay, I just want to say thank you for your comments. We do recognize that, in order to ensure that the health care system does meet the needs of the people of Ontario, obviously there has to be investment. I did speak to that at the very beginning. But we also understand that it is a complex system, and if one changes one part of it, it does cause a ripple throughout the others. Moving towards an integrated health care system strengthens the bands that will allow our system more flexibility, in my mind.

To the member for Scarborough Southwest, you spoke about the past government, how it brought forward legislation, and we recognize that, for all of us, what we want from this government is to ensure that the health care system meets the needs, meets the test for the people of Ontario. That's what people want to know: Is it going to

be there for them when they need it? They want to be able to access it in a system that will meet their needs and that they can rely on, and that's a public health care system. That's what people want. That's what we're providing. We spoke to the specific dollars and the significant investment that the McGuinty government has made.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Erie-Lincoln.

Applause.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Thank you to the chief government whip—very kind.

I'm pleased to rise to address Bill 171 this evening. Obviously, as has been expressed by my colleagues and our hard-working health critic, Elizabeth Witmer, we have a number of concerns about Bill 171: the nature of the bill's construction and some pieces that are missing from the act, which I will get to momentarily. I also have a number of letters and e-mails from constituents, as you will appreciate, that I will take the opportunity tonight to read into the record.

Let me first say that I'm pleased to see the Minister of Health in the House this evening. It's not always that you have a minister whose bill is before the House here for night sittings. It used to be a tradition; not everybody follows it. It's good to see the Minister of Health this evening, listening to debate.

I extend my personal congratulations to him as well. We were just chatting. His wedding is coming up in early August, so I wish him all the best and congratulations. I think I owe him a press release, though, if I remember, from when the sides of the floor were reversed back in October 2002. So I'll have to work that up. I've got a few months to figure out an angle. We'll figure something out.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: There will be no Vera Wang dress. There's no Vera Wang dress in my size.

Mr. Hudak: No, Vera Wang probably won't enter into it this time. But maybe there's something else we could do.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Pinocchio?

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Well, Pinocchio is resting up. He has a busy day planned tomorrow. Poor Pinocchio. So he's trying to get his sleep.

I do want to just say, by way of introduction, before I get into the substance of Bill 171, I'm not sure if this bill will actually have the time for debate before the House recesses. I think all of us are anticipating that the government won't want to sit very long in this current session. Maybe I'll be proved wrong. That may very well be the case. But I suspect that this session will be a very short-lived one. The government will not want scrutiny of its broken promises, for example, its wasteful spending. Any time there is a question period, those things are exposed. It's easier for the government not to be facing the daily question period, and that's why I suspect it will be a short session. If I'm wrong, then we will see Bill 171 in further

debate. But you wonder why a bill of this significance in scope would be introduced with just a few months left in the lifetime of this government in terms of the legislative sitting. It has only been active for a week or two of the legislative sitting.

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I think one of the reasons we are here currently is because right now over in the Frost building the finance minister is writing cheques just as fast as his arm can carry him until the ink runs out in his quill. The McGuinty government currently is sitting on at least a \$3-billion slush fund. I think one of the reasons we're here right now is that if they can expend those funds before the end of the fiscal year, which is March 31, they won't be put towards balancing the books and going towards debt repayment, as a surplus would.

You may remember last year at this point in time, similarly, the McGuinty government was sitting on a \$3-billion cushion, and they went on what I know my colleague remembers as a mad money spending spree to blow all that money out the door just as quick as they were able. In fact, the Auditor General admonished the government for that spending. Of course, when you do that at the end of the fiscal year and just throw it out the window or out the door, there are no strings attached.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: My colleagues across say, "Oh, it went for transportation." Well, you don't know. They could have spent it on anything that they chose to do.

I expect we'll probably see the same thing happening right now. Are massage therapists covered in Bill 171, I ask the health minister?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: They're already regulated.

Mr. Hudak: I ask because the finance minister is going to need a massage therapist on that arm of his from signing all of those end-of-year cheques, some \$3 billion, which if I recall is about \$1.2 billion in two contingency funds—which are really just slush funds, right?—some \$1 billion in reserve and, as a small-c conservative estimate, at least \$400 million in additional tax revenue that has not yet been declared and at least \$400 million in interest savings. It's the old trick: They underestimate the taxes that are coming in, they overestimate interest costs and at the end of the year they say, "Wow, look at all this money," but instead of doing what would be a responsible thing to do, make sure that you balance the books, they blow it out the door to try to artificially create a deficit.

What that has meant, I say to my colleague from Perth-Middlesex, is, I think you know, some \$20 billion in additional spending since Dalton McGuinty became Premier of the province. It's roughly a 34% increase, which is simply breathtaking. This would make Adrienne Clarkson blush, that kind of spending, right? I think he agrees.

I think that's really why we're here: to allow the government to artificially create a deficit and spend money like it's going out of style as we head towards the end of the fiscal year.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: We will find out tomorrow, you're right. We will find out tomorrow what the budget says, but I would think, as it stands today, we're in a surplus position. We'll see how much the minister blows out the door this evening.

I have one letter here provided to me from Joan Worthington, MSA—master of social work, right?—RSW, who has some grave concerns about Bill 171 and the Psychotherapy Act, specifically, as has been addressed in the assembly this evening, the exclusion of social work from the provision of psychotherapy services, which she shared with members from the Niagara area. Let me read part of her letter, dated less than a month ago.

"I am alarmed that the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has not followed the recommendations made by the Health Professionals Regulatory Advisory Council"—HPRAC—"in the highly credible Regulation of Health Professions Ontario: New Directions (2006) report. This report recognizes social work as one of the four professions qualified to provide psychotherapy. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, through Bill 171, has now excluded social workers from the regulation of psychotherapy," making it a controlled act and, as Ms. Worthington would argue, giving a dominance in the profession to the hospital sector.

Usually when you hear pronouncements from this government on their health policy, it's to take services out of the hospital sector and towards community care. I would argue that a large part of their policy has been creating middle managers in these so-called local health integration networks, which are anything but local. Lord knows the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been—

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You don't like an office in Grimsby? We'll take it out of Grimsby for you.

Mr. Hudak: The minister is saying he's going to take the office out of Grimsby because I criticized his policy. I'll say to the minister—and I think he knows my arguments. He has amalgamated Niagara's health care decision-making with Hamilton, Haldimand, Norfolk, Brampton and Burlington. So I think if you make it larger like that, no, it's certainly not local. Nor do I think it's a wise investment of health dollars to create more middle managers, spending all that money on furniture and staff.

We do have an office in Grimsby. We see cars in the parking lot, but I think a number of tumbleweeds will go through the parking lot, because I don't see much activity other than meetings. Maybe I'll be proven wrong. Maybe there will be some investments of substance through the LHIN process, but to date I think there have been a lot of meetings and hand-holding but no benefit to patient care as a result of this experiment, which is far behind schedule.

I was going to point out a bit of the irony, though, that the ministry will usually say that they're taking services out of the hospital sector into community care, but it appears the move in Bill 171 with respect to the Psychotherapy Act goes in the opposite direction.

Let me go on further, because Ms. Worthington discusses the Niagara Peninsula in particular.

"I would like to elaborate on my concern for the Niagara region and our entire range of health and social services. If unchanged, the Psychotherapy Act will profoundly disrupt or cause the cessation of all of these services:

"(1) The delivery of social work treatment services within the entire mental health delivery system including the services of Niagara health system's mental health services and the large number of community-based mental health services.

"(2) The delivering of children's mental health services in agencies such as Niagara Child and Youth Services, which is staffed almost entirely with social workers who are providing psychotherapeutic services for children and families."

I don't want to read too much, but she makes some excellent points, so I'll go on to her third point.

"(3) The delivery of individual, couple, family and group services at community agencies such as Family Counselling Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association, Niagara Region Sexual Assault Centre, and so many more. Social workers are a large part of the staffing complement in these agencies and the provision of psychotherapeutic services is part, if not all, of the services they provide."

That is why Ms. Worthington, among many others in the social work field, has taken great exception to this government's approach in Bill 171 with respect to the Psychotherapy Act, and I don't know if we've heard an adequate response—maybe we will later in debate—as to why the government has chosen to toss out HPRAC's recommendations in this particular area.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: That has already been resolved, actually.

Mr. Hudak: The minister says it has been resolved. Maybe I'll get a letter from Ms. Worthington saying that she's satisfied, but I'll tell the minister this is pretty fresh—February 28.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: All right. We'll see if she sends a follow-up letter, but I think this is a letter of some substance, and I'm pleased to read it into the record.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Well, if we get a chance to debate further in second reading of this bill, I'll be pleased to read Ms. Worthington's further discourse into the record, because I think she has put a lot of thought into her correspondence and I'm pleased to do so on her behalf tonight.

Another gentleman by the name of David Cockman from Beamsville—of course, Beamsville is in my riding, where the Tim Hudak action centre is located. Mr. Cockman is not too far from my office, as a matter of fact. He makes a similar point. Let me read from his e-mail, which was Friday, February 23.

"Hello Tim. I'm extremely concerned with the proposed amendment under Bill 171, the Psychotherapy Act. The exclusion of social workers from the Psycho-

therapy Act represents an unfair and unjustifiable downgrading of the profession's role in the provision of highly skilled clinical services. Since social workers are the largest regulated profession in Ontario providing counselling and psychotherapy services (compared to the small pool of physicians, psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists and occupational therapists), this exclusion will have a significant impact on the public's ability to access services." Mr. Cockman goes on to say, "In fact, the exclusion of social workers from the Psychotherapy Act undermines both mental health reform and primary health care reform, which are key priorities of the current provincial government. In northern and rural communities, access to psychotherapy will become even more difficult."

Of course, representing a part of Ontario that would describe itself as rural, Mr. Cockman's concerns are mine, as the MPP, and I'm sure widespread in the riding of Erie—Lincoln. As I've said before, I know our health critic has spoken about this issue; we'll take it up further. I know my colleagues here in the assembly tonight will debate further on Bill 171. I don't mean to belabour this point in particular, but I think it's of importance to the extent that my constituents have responded to it quite strongly, asking for the government to change this aspect of the act.

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I have some further correspondence sent to me from other constituents, basically reiterating some points that have already been made by the Ontario Association of Social Workers. In their document they describe the problem, indicate what they are doing and encourage individuals to similarly act and take up this important cause. They obviously have spurred interest because I've received a number of similar correspondences from individual social workers. They have concerns as well with Bill 14, but I guess I'll reserve those comments for another day.

I've also received recent correspondence, on March 7, from the Homeopathic Medical Council of Canada with respect to Bill 171, the bill before the House this evening, this with respect to schedule P, as in papa, the Naturopathy and Homeopathy Act, 2006. Let me read some parts here from Ranvir Sharda, who's the president of the HMCC: "We the president and board of directors of the Homeopathic Medical Council of Canada believe that Bill 171, if passed in the present format will not be responsive to the needs of the Ontario public, and it will be the greatest disservice to the future of homeopathy, in this province and in Canada." Very strong language from the HMCC. I know the minister doesn't take it lightly and hopefully will respond to their concerns as addressed in this letter of March 7.

"We respectfully approach you to amend this Bill 171 for the following reasons:

"(1) The bill is biased in favour of naturopathy; it allows naturopaths several controlled acts and denies the same to homeopaths;

"(2) It is recommended in the HPRAC report to the Minister Health and Long-Term Care that homeopaths

and naturopaths be co-located in the same place, after proposing preferential treatment to naturopaths. This is the greatest disservice to homeopathy;

“(3) The HPRAC chair, Ms. Barbara Sullivan employed a retired pharmacist, Mr. Jim Dunsdon, with no knowledge of homeopathy, the beneficiaries of this being a couple of business people and the naturopathic college. The motives are unknown to us and we do not wish to speculate,” and they go on on that issue. Again, these words signed by Ranvir Sharda, the president of the HMCC, obviously express some very strong reservations about the McGuinty government’s approach to this act on schedule P.

I think there are 42 different schedules—42 separate acts, sorry—that are impacted by what Speaker McLean would call an ominous bill. Some remember those days. The omnibus bill here has 42.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Some are trying to forget.

Mr. Hudak: Well, it’s still worth a good line once in a while.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): We remember those days, don’t we, Tim?

Mr. Hudak: Well, they were certainly a lot of fun—some aspects, some not.

The Dental Hygiene Act, 1991, has some improvements in this legislation, Bill 171. This act amends to allow dental hygienists to perform the authorized acts of scaling teeth and root planing, including curetting surrounding tissue, without requiring an order from a dentist under certain circumstances. It’s amended to introduce new regulation-making powers to the college to prescribe requirements for the performance of the new authorized acts listed above. The college will also be required to identify the drugs or categories of drugs that may be used by members.

I think my colleagues, and you as well, Mr. Speaker, will remember that my former colleague and friend and now federal finance minister, God bless him, Jim Flaherty, had brought forward Bill 116 in 2004. Bill 116 was called the Dental Hygiene Amendment Act, 2004. It would have amended, if passed through three readings, the Dental Hygiene Act, 1991, to remove present restrictions preventing scaling teeth and root planing, including curetting surrounding tissue, unless a dentist has ordered those procedures. Penny White, the ODHA president, in response to Bill 171, says, “It has taken ODHA a very long time to get our issue on the government’s agenda. We are pleased the Liberal government is fulfilling its campaign promise and committing to act on HPRAC’s recommendations to increase access to dental hygiene services.” Well, it’s about time.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Another promise kept.

Mr. Hudak: What should I call it? The deathbed conversion, the deathbed promise-keeping. We’ll see if this is actually enacted. It’s been three years since this promise was made, and there was resistance from the government at the time. There was significant resistance. It took a heck of a long time. If there was no resistance, then

why is it now, in the last few weeks of the legislative sitting, of McGuinty’s last year in office, that this has finally come forward? I’m just curious why that’s the case. But I shouldn’t be too cynical. I hope this is all meant in good faith and that finally the government has come around to a position endorsed by my colleague Mr. Flaherty, which I was very pleased to support as well, I think in both incarnations. I’m pleased to see finally that progress has been made in this regard.

There are a number of other acts, as I mentioned, that are impacted by Bill 171. I know my colleagues will discuss some others, but I thought it important to concentrate on those three. I hope there will be plenty of time for a serious review of the details of this legislation in the committee process. I know my friend the whip will be working very hard to ensure that that takes place, and the government House leader as well, who I know has been copied on some of the same correspondence I have.

I think probably we’re ending this particular sitting of the Legislature as we will sit some time tomorrow to hear the budget, and I will wrap up my comments again in the context of the financial state of the province of Ontario. We have great concern about the rapid increase in program spending with little real benefit for Ontario taxpayers. We can’t forget that Dalton McGuinty, in one of his most infamous broken promises, of many, increased taxes substantially on working families and seniors, as my colleague from Durham says, the largest tax hike in the history of the province. It made Bob Rae look like a piker back when he was a New Democrat.

We certainly hope that with the—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: My friend from Beaches says he was always a Liberal. We had that discussion earlier. Fair enough. The point being that he made Bob Rae look like a piker. With all the fiscal room the finance minister has with the recent increase in transfers, courtesy of Stephen Harper and Jim Flaherty keeping their campaign promises, we certainly hope that we will finally see some tax relief for hard-working families in tomorrow’s budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Prue: It’s always a pleasure to comment on the member for Erie–Lincoln. He brings a different perspective, not one that I always agree with, but he is certainly eloquent in how he says it.

I was listening to him quite intently until he got to the last little bit when he started talking about the unprecedented tax hike of the Liberals. New Democrats think we need that money. We differ on how it’s taken, because we think it should be done in a more progressive way through income tax rather than the regressive way in which it was done. But having said that, I still have some difficulties understanding how a health system which was so badly broken and which remains in some cases in some crisis over many years of neglect could have been fixed without that infusion of money. I would like perhaps for my friend, in his rebuttal, to explain the position of his party in terms of the \$2.5 billion. If you come back to say that it is not being taken properly and that it should

be taken by some other method, but the money is needed, I can understand that. I can empathize, and I would agree with you, because there are better methods of obtaining the \$2.5 billion than the one that this government chose to do.

But if you come back and tell me that the money is not needed, I have to seriously question your commitment or the commitment of your party to the Canada Health Act and how health services are going to be delivered in this country. I think many people are very curious, because I hear in this debate the accusations going back and forth, but I have never clearly understood the Conservative position. I'm hoping that in two minutes you might make it very clear whether you intend to do away with the \$2.5 billion and not substitute anything for it or whether you think there is a better way of collecting it. I think we need to know.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

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Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I think my colleague from Beaches–East York did a very effective job of picking up on something we've been on to. The Conservatives talk a lot about health care and they ask for a lot of money for health care, but they're not honest with people about their commitment to cut \$2.5 billion from health care.

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I withdraw the word "honest." They could be more candid—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: He's withdrawn—well, no, maybe the point of order is something else; I may be presumptuous.

Mr. Arnott: I'm satisfied that the minister has withdrawn his unparliamentary remark.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I want to reaffirm a few things that I've said on this bill prior. Firstly, this bill will definitely go to committee. That's a tradition that we've established as a party in government. We're proud of it. The Conservative Party very, very rarely had bills go to committee.

Number two, why has this taken some time? It's difficult work, for sure. HPRAC, the health professions review advisory committee, which gives advice around this, was allowed to become defunct under the previous government. In fact, I had to form a new board and ask them to fulfill the legislative obligation to present annual reports because the previous minister, Tony Clement, had allowed this body to basically die off.

The Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association and the dentists of Ontario are to be applauded, because they did tremendously difficult work together that's helped to inform what's in this bill. I'm enormously proud of the work that those organizations did and I think it bodes very well for our patients.

On the issue of social work, indeed I sent a letter very recently to the leadership in social work to let them know that as this bill goes out to committee—if it has the support of this Legislature to do so; I don't want to presume that—we would most certainly make amend-

ment to include them in this bill. It had been our intention to include social workers for the act of psychotherapy by moving a regulation to another bill that regulates them, but at the heart of the matter we agree with the social workers and we'll be very pleased to bring forward a government amendment that would have them included as they desire.

Mr. O'Toole: It is important and refreshing that the minister's here, but the question is, is he listening? I suspect the member from Erie–Lincoln and his arguments that he put forward were extremely important and related to the importance and sensitivity of this bill.

I've mentioned, in the few times I've had to speak on this, that if you look at a bill this big—an omnibus bill with 17 schedules and some 40 acts that they're amending. As I go through each of the A to Q schedules and just read the very thin notes that are available to us from the minister—under schedule H, the Health Information Protection Act and the smart systems for health and the trouble they're in and the consent of who knows what about my personal information.

The minister, in his response, talked about schedule Q, I think, which is the schedule dealing with the psychotherapists. I've had hundreds and hundreds of letters, met with individuals, professionals in my riding, who are terrified. In fact, last night at a public meeting of over 300 people on children's mental health and the cuts he's made to Lakeridge Health—a psychiatrist was there from the Whitby psychiatric hospital, and psychotherapists were there. The risk it puts to persons who are double victimized—victimized by the cuts to health care at Lakeridge: \$3.6 million. These are real people with real concerns. They have serious concerns with this entire bill. It was mentioned not by me, as witnessed by Mr. Prue from Beaches–East York—he can attest—as well as Sid Ryan and other persons who are advocates, and I understand that. This bill needs a very careful—and the minister will get a copy of Hansard to quote him, because I'll send it to the two psychotherapists there last night to make sure that he's held to account. But I said last night, Minister, respectfully, that this bill will never pass.

Mr. Bisson: I always appreciate the comments made by the member from Erie–Lincoln. Although we probably don't agree philosophically on some things, I certainly respect his position as far as what he's trying to say. But I want to echo part of what my colleague Mr. Prue was saying, the member from Beaches–East York, which is that we agree with the Conservative Party that the \$2.5-billion tax—the way that it was done by the Liberals, in our view, was not the way to do it. We believe that in fact it should come off your income tax; it shouldn't be done in the way it was done. But you can't have your cake and eat it too. If you're going to take \$2.5 billion out of the system, there's no magic wand out there that says you can save \$2.5 billion somewhere else in the system or somewhere else within the government to make up that shortfall. I think it's incumbent upon us to be clear in our positions. If the Tories are saying that they want to eliminate the \$2.5-billion health premium, then

there needs to be some way of saying where you're going to get that money. You certainly can't find it in the health care system; there's not a \$2.5-billion savings to be had, I think. If you start taking \$2.5 billion out of the health care budget, you're going to have all kinds of people in the health sector across Ontario basically jumping up and down, yelling that they can't get services that are needed within their communities. So where are you going to get it, is my point?

The reality is that if we want a public health care system, we need to pay for it. We need to make sure that (a) the system is adequately funded, and (b) that it's properly run, as efficiently and effectively as possible, dollar for dollar. But then we've got to put the money forward. I believe the best way to do that is by way of income tax. One of the ways we're able to equalize the responsibility across society, I believe the fairest tax, is that of income tax, based on people's ability to pay. The more money you make, obviously, the more you're going to pay, because you have a higher income. The less you make, the less you have to pay, because of a lower income. I think that's only the fair way to do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Erie-Lincoln, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Hudak: I'm pleased to respond. I appreciate the comments from members all.

The first thing about this so-called health tax is that it's nothing but an income tax. It doesn't—

Mr. O'Toole: It's general revenue.

Mr. Hudak: It's a regressive tax, no doubt. In fact, you could argue that it's even more regressive than a flat tax, the way that it has been imposed. I think people who had voted for the Ontario Liberal Party would be shocked that they had brought in the most regressive tax hike probably in the history of Ontario, hitting at seniors and low-income individuals at the heart. They would oppose, no doubt, a flat tax, but this has a greater regressive element in it because of the nature of its design.

I'm sure there were a lot of brains behind closed doors when McGuinty thought this one up in terms of how to break his promise and increase taxes. I'm sure they went through the motherhood and apple pie tax; they probably went through the Canada tax; they probably thought of the "all good things to all people" tax, and ended up calling it a health tax. The reality is, it goes into the consolidated revenue fund. I think we had brought forward suggestions like, "Sure, then earmark it for health care," but they ignored those suggestions. It goes to the same place as tobacco tax; it goes to the same place as gas taxes; it goes to the same place as the money that comes in from Casino Niagara, which is giant pot of money sitting there in the Minister of Finance's office—up some \$20 billion to date, a 34% increase in spending by the revenue that has come into the province of Ontario.

The reality is that program spending has gone up by over an 8% average per year under the Dalton McGuinty government, while the growth rate of the economy, on a nominal basis, has been 4% at best. And when you look at some of the figures for 2005-06, specifically, health

care grew at a certain per cent and education has been higher, and then funding for programs outside of health care and education had the highest growth rate, of some 20%.

Unfortunately, we're out of time.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Prue: It's a pleasure and I consider a privilege to be able to rise and speak to this debate.

I would like to preface my remarks with a meeting that I attended last night. It was not in my riding and it was not particularly in any field of which I am regularly a critic. Being a member of the New Democratic Party, you have to wear many hats, and as most of you know, as well as being a deputy-deputy Speaker, I am called upon to be a critic in some six areas, including finance and municipal affairs and democratic renewal and all these things. But last night I had an opportunity to go out to Oshawa because there was a need for a New Democrat to be there.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Where was Sid Ryan?

Mr. Prue: They wanted a member of the Legislature, and they requested a member from each party.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: But Sid's your acting leader.

Mr. Prue: They wanted a member from each party, and we have 10 members, and one of the 10 needed to be there, and I was chosen to go there. I had an opportunity to delve into an area which primarily is the prerogative of my colleague from Nickel Belt. Shelley Martel is the person who is the critic for health care and seniors' services. She is the one who understands that. In a small party like ours, we are forced to compartmentalize. We are forced to look at our own critic areas and to try to specialize as best we can within them.

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But when I went last night to Lakeridge, went to Oshawa and listened about the problems at Lakeridge, one of the things that came up during that debate—it wasn't only the shutting down of service and the fears of a community and the loss of \$8 million. What came up during that debate was that many people worried about this particular bill. We had health care professionals there who were worried about some of the provisions of the bill. We had some hospital administrators who were worried about what the provisions of the bill would do to Lakeridge and to other hospitals. We had municipal representatives. We had a couple of mayors, some councillors, who were worried about how this bill might affect their community hospital.

I tried as best I could to understand the concerns in an area with which, I must admit, I am not entirely familiar. It is very difficult in this House to stay on top of all the bills that come before us, and we often have to deal with the advice we are given by our staff, our researchers and, most especially in terms of health, the advice I am given by my colleague from Nickel Belt.

In terms of that meeting last night, it became very clear to me that there is angst within the community. There are people who are upset and who fear for their jobs and how those jobs might be impacted by this par-

ticular bill. I promised some of them that I would speak about that here tonight, about what they had to say. But I also want to speak for just a few minutes about the community feeling in Oshawa and the Durham area about what is happening at Lakeridge hospital. It appears that this has not been handled well by the government. I listened intently and in fact took a copy of the question asked yesterday by the members for Oshawa and for Durham—a two-part question—and the response given by the Minister of Health. That did not seem to most of the people to be a satisfactory response.

I said some nice things about the minister in my two-minute response earlier today. I would just try to give some constructive criticism to him that he needs to get out a much better message to the people of Oshawa and Durham than he did in the response in this House yesterday. He needs to tell them the rationale for his decision to cut \$8 million from that hospital budget and to put the lives and the careers and the health and safety of the citizens who either work there or who use the service—he needs to explain it in a much better way. I explained to them that often the answers we get in question period relate very little to the questions asked. I told a little joke that everybody in this House has probably heard a hundred times but which they had not: That's why it's called question period, not answer period. But the people there are expecting some answers, and I hope you will be candid with them about why that needs to be done and why \$8 million is being taken out of the service involving mental health issues, involving social workers who deliver psychotherapy. They need to hear that at the same time this bill is going through.

Having said that, I'd like to go into the actual meat of the bill, if I might. The provisions of the bill, or what was expected to be in the bill, were not known to me until I received a letter from one of my constituents. My constituent Mr. Polski wrote a letter that said in part, "As a social worker who is your constituent, the omission of the recognition of the profession of social work as a provider of psychotherapy is an unjustifiable error that will affect me personally and my ability to earn a living.... The exclusion of social work from this bill is unfair and unreasonable."

When I received this, first of all I couldn't believe it was true. Not having the resources that some other members may have, because of the size of our party, I sent it to my colleague, who knows a great deal. I sent it to Ms. Martel, the member from Nickel Belt. I sent it and I asked her what she thought about it. She also found it to be a little bit difficult and did, of course, the absolutely correct thing. She sent it off to the minister's office. She did, after some time—I will be complimentary again—get an answer from a member of your staff, who indicated that it was going to be resolved. I take you at your word that it's going to be resolved, and I took you at your word that it was going to be resolved by regulation. But I am much happier today to understand that it is going to be fixed at the time of public hearings when this goes to committee, because it is not satisfactory to me,

nor is it satisfactory to the people who work in social work and who do psychotherapy, that it is merely done by regulation. They need and they have the right—as Mr. Polski said, it should not have been omitted. It needs to be contained within the body of the act so that it cannot be changed at the whim of a future health minister, cannot be changed if the government changes simply by a regulation of the minister in cabinet, but if it is to be changed, it needs to come back before this Legislature. The social workers need that assurance, and I promised at least one person last night that I would seek to make sure that happened, that it is not done by regulation—and I'm glad it won't be—that it is contained within the body of the bill.

Having said that, there is an opportunity after second reading debate—and I don't know how long it's going to go on. I know this is the second day. I also know that the lead speaker for the official opposition will be making her statement on a subsequent afternoon or evening, either this week or next week, whenever the bill is again called. And I'm sure, with the government majority, it is in all likelihood going to go to committee, be ordered for committee. So the government has an opportunity over the next few weeks to sit down and do some detailed study with the unions and the organizations representing social workers across this province. I would not be content if the government merely comes in with an amendment and then asks people what they think of the amendment or to comment on it. It behooves them, given the lateness of the hour and the importance of the issue, to sit down with the groups and hammer out what they need and put the amendments forward in a rational way so that the members of the opposition can see them and can in turn consult with the groups and with the unions, can do what is necessary to make amendments and to understand whether or not the needs have been fully met. They have been left out even though this bill is 147 pages long, even though it contains 42 acts. These omnibus bills are very difficult and often do not contain what is necessary.

I know the minister will do the right thing, I know the minister intends to do the right thing, and I am merely adding my voice to what I think is important: that you consult with them in advance of the amendments actually being tabled in the committee so that everybody has an opportunity to look at them and give input so it can be made as strong as possible.

I know my constituent Mr. Polski would be happy. His last line—"the exclusion of social work from this bill is unfair and unreasonable"—would have been mitigated.

That's the first point I wanted to make. I am happy that the government is moving on this.

The second point—I have not heard much debate about this. I was not here for the first part of the debate yesterday, but I have been here all day today, and I haven't heard anyone talk about schedule A. I am from Toronto. There was a meeting tonight of the board of trade and I was asked to give a few words on behalf of our caucus. I spoke about having lived in Toronto for 58 years of my 58-year life. I've spent my entire life living

in the largest city in Canada. This is where I'm from. I'm not from a rural or northern community. But I try very often to understand the needs of places outside of Toronto. This is not the universe. There are many, many communities, as we all know, in this province. Toronto, although we meet here, is not the centre of that universe. It is merely, and should be seen as, a big part of it, but it is not the whole thing.

2100

Schedule A troubles me, and I've not heard anything about this. I'd just like to read in part a news article which brought this to my attention. It comes from the Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal, dated Sunday, December 17, 2006, City News, by Jonathan Wilson. It's an interview with Lori Marshall, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre's senior vice-president of patient care services, who said that the requirement for nurses to come on the flights has been difficult to accommodate because of the hospital's already stretched resources. They're having a heck of a time trying to get nurses to come on because the hospital just doesn't have them, and we all know that. She went on to say:

"I can say that it's challenging us to be able to find a nurse when required to do these transports.... It's certainly adding complexity to the air transport."

"Marshall said the change is a reversal of a move made last April, which allowed charter firms to airlift patients using one advanced care paramedic and a primary care paramedic, rather than nurses.

"Regional currently airlifts about 500 patients a year to London, Hamilton, Toronto or Ottawa using private aircraft.

"The changes affect Thunder Bay companies Air Bravo and Thunder Airlines.

"An official at Thunder Airlines declined to comment Friday, but confirmed that the company has had to lay off five of its seven advanced care paramedics as a result of the move.

"The revised requirements leave Regional, which currently has vacancies in many nursing positions, short another one or two staff members each day to travel with outgoing patients.

"We don't have positions that are sitting around that would be able to do this," Marshall said.

"Nurses who travel with patients also accompany them in land ambulances until they arrive at hospitals in southern Ontario. Marshall said that as a result, the nurses are often forced to find commercial flights to bring them back to Thunder Bay."

I don't see anything in this bill that is going to alleviate the concern brought forward in this newspaper article. I don't see anything that is going to help small and northern and rural communities that are forced to airlift people, because they don't have big hospitals or the necessary care in their communities, to do so properly. Surely, if the person is in stable enough condition that a fully functioning and trained paramedic can look after them, we should allow them to do so. To take nurses who are already strained in the regional hospitals, who are

already too few in number, and put this kind of effort on them does not seem to me to be right, yet schedule A does exactly this.

I would suggest that the minister take a very good look at schedule A. I would suggest that the minister and the Liberal caucus see whether we are meeting the needs of Ontario, in fact whether we are taking away from the people of Ontario and their small regional hospitals by forcing nurses out of them. Surely, if a paramedic can suffice for a one-hour or two-hour flight from somewhere in rural or northern Ontario to one of the big hospitals, be it London or Ottawa or Toronto or Sudbury or anywhere else, then that is what should be done. If the person is too ill, then I assume that from time to time a doctor or a nurse might be needed, but in the majority of cases I would think a fully trained paramedic might be sufficient.

I ask the government to take a very good look at schedule A, because it is not going to meet the needs of those people who choose to or who must live in small or rural places.

Again, I'm a fellow from Toronto who has lived here his whole life and who can go right down the street, down University Avenue, to any number of specialized hospitals. I can walk to them from here. There are so many of them down that street that other communities simply do not have access to. We need to make sure that those northern communities are protected.

Last but not least, I want to talk about one of the other provisions, which is schedule B. I don't really have anything to say against schedule B, but I wonder what has not been included. I know that the nurses of Ontario have asked for a number of changes to the Regulated Health Professions Act that are not contained within the body and that I think should be contained because I don't think they're unreasonable. There are four of them that I would like to talk about that I think should have been in this act, and perhaps can be.

If we're going to be doing some amendments anyway, let's look at putting these in, because the nurses of Ontario think these are important, and I think they are too. The first is the addition of new controlled acts to the Nursing Act, 1991: prescribing a drug and setting or casting a fracture of a bone or a dislocation of a joint. The second one they want to have included is an expansion of existing controlled acts: the ordering of energy diagnostic testing. The third one is the regulatory changes to a number of different acts: the Public Hospitals Act, the Health Insurance Act, the Regulated Health Professions Act, the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act. They're looking for changes to those as well. And last but not least, they are looking for changes to allow RNs, registered nurses, in the extended class to care for in-patients in hospitals, order and apply more forms of energy and expand authority to order tests. That's what the nurses have been asking for. Surely, if we are doing a 147-page mega-act here to make some changes, we can do something that will actually benefit the hard-working nurses of this province.

You have committed to change the act, you have committed to take this into committee and you have committed to make the necessary changes for psychotherapy and for social workers. So, in conclusion and quite simply, I'm asking you three things: Number one, if you're going there anyway, consult with the social workers first. Number two, if you're going there anyway, make some changes to the air ambulance in schedule A which will accommodate the people in northern Ontario and allow the nurses and the doctors to stay in the hospitals where they belong if, in fact, a paramedic can do the job for the limited period of time that the flight is taking. And last but not least, please listen to the nurses. What they're asking for appears to me to be eminently reasonable.

If all of those things are done, I'm sure you're going to get tremendous support around the committee table and maybe this can come back very fast. I know that the government is very anxious to have this bill, and indeed it may be one of the last bills before this House is prorogued for the election in October. I don't know how much longer we are going to be here. I've heard estimates that it could be a few weeks or until the end of May. I haven't heard anything much later than that. So if the government is intent on getting this bill passed, surely those changes would help to elicit all-party support, so we can get on with it and do it right. Those would be my comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I want to thank the member for Beaches–East York. I want to answer some of the points that he's raised. Firstly, most assuredly I tell the honourable member that we'll be working directly with the social workers—Abid Malik in my office is the primary lead on this—and we fundamentally agree that it's necessary that the amendment that we bring forward is one that has been well circulated and meets with the agreement of all parties. It has always been our intention to ensure that social workers had the capability of practising psychotherapy. The mechanism by which we were intending to do it was not ideal, and accordingly, that's why we've been clear in saying that we will bring forward that amendment, and we'll certainly consult on it.

Any points, obviously, that are brought forward in this debate that warrant consideration for amendment and the like, we'll take full consideration of those, and I want to thank members for that.

I'd like to just take one minute or so and talk a little bit about air ambulance—schedule A has been referenced—to speak about what is brought to life in the bill. People will know that Ontario's air ambulance program is a world-leading program studied by many and considered in competition for quality, really, with only one that operates in Australia, especially recognizing the vastness of the territory that it serves. What we seek to do is bring those capacities of what we all Ornge—Ornge medical transport—and add a greater critical care capacity by having alongside the air ambulance system 15 critical care land-based ambulances which would operate in the vicinity of those hospitals in our province that are

doing the toughest stuff. For example, you have a trauma patient who flies by an air ambulance helicopter and needs transfer from an airport into a hospital in a community like Sudbury. We would have a critical care land ambulance available with the most sophisticated and well-trained advanced paramedics, who would take some of that responsibility off the shoulders of the municipal service and negate some of that circumstance where people are leaving hospitals unsupported. So I thank the honourable member.

2110

Mr. O'Toole: It's reassuring to see that the minister is here, and I give him full credit for that. He has mentioned some of the responses that were provoking the discussion on the air ambulance and the issues that I brought up. There are critical elements in that on the disclosure piece.

With respect to the member from Beaches–East York, I give him due credit for the hard work he does and the fact that he came out last night and spoke as he always does, sincerely and in a very informed and genuine, passionate mode, about the social work issue on schedule Q. I was happy with his three-point approach to the minister tonight to get his assurance—because what was said last night, for community mental health and for that issue, was quite frankly that the psychotherapists who were there, if I take the liberty to interpret what I heard, under OHIP rules are allowed a maximum of 12 procedural visits—isn't that what you heard?—and that isn't sufficient time in some cases. That's the scope of the practice.

Yes, he's going to permit the practice and have it under the Regulated Health Professions Act in some way, working under psychiatrists, I guess, as a case manager model. But I am still concerned. The levels of qualification and the college regulatory group are so important for the professionalization but, more importantly, for the patients themselves, so that they don't get the cheapest treatment, they get the best treatment.

As I look through the schedule, I'm more and more concerned, because one of the issues that I find filtering through almost every one of the 17 schedules—it's not just the immunization or the drinking water regulations. But under the Regulated Health Professions Act, let me say to the minister, I do agree with certain sections there adding some of the dental hygienists and others—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Bisson: I just want to say that it's always a pleasure to listen to my good friend and colleague, Mr. Prue, the member from Beaches–East York. I think Mr. Prue brings a certain perspective to the Legislature. Without question, he can be the most ferocious of adversaries in debate and in question period, but I think he also tries to be somewhat fair-minded when trying to approach issues, recognizing that there are two sides to the argument but clearly knowing what side he's on and articulating that. I think it's a good testament to—how would you say it?—his survivability in this business, because everybody knows where Michael Prue stands and there are no ifs,

ands or buts about it. When he's onside, he's onside, and you know you've got a good ally.

From my perspective as a northern member, I also want to say that he took the time to raise the issue around air ambulances. Those are some really good ideas that he raised. It's really refreshing to know that all those trips where I've taken him up to the James Bay in my riding are starting to pay off, because I'm building allies who are prepared to work with me on some of these issues. I think it's good. I encourage all members, not just the members who live in northern Ontario—because obviously my good friend Mr. Bartolucci and I go there every weekend; when the House is not in session, we're there normally—but members who are from places outside of northern Ontario to really try to travel and understand what the special challenges are. How do you run a health care system in a part of the province that is vast, where great distances separate one community from the other? In some situations, communities are very small and are not able to offer the full range of service that you want.

So I want to thank my good friend Mr. Prue for having raised those issues on behalf of us northerners. Know that there's always a fish in a river somewhere waiting for Michael, and he'll always feel welcome when that fish jumps on his line.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): It's a pleasure to join in this debate on Bill 171. I listened intently to Mr. Prue's comments. I couldn't help but note that he failed in his comments really to recognize that Bill 171 is part of a much larger approach by this government. I think we're a government that has recognized many of the challenges that are facing us when it comes to health care. In fact, what we've done is move forward on a number of fronts: investing in community health care, investing in things like community mental health, home care, home supports. We've tried to reorganize the delivery of our health care through the LHIN system.

It's important to point out, as Mr. O'Toole did, that the minister has been present at this debate and has been participating. It's after 9 o'clock. This minister has brought an imagination and creativity to it. I think Bill 171 builds on that. Bill 171 is going to increase access by patients to new health services and do it in a very safe and secure way.

Finally, realizing I don't have very much time, I did want to pick up on something Mr. Prue, the member from Beaches–East York, spoke about in the course of tonight's debate. He asked about the \$2.5 billion that the Conservatives are talking about taking out of health care and asked where that might come from. If I can quote that great philosopher, Dr. Phil, who always says that past actions are great predictors, I thought I'd share with the member a press release I have here from February 23, 1996:

"Health Minister Jim Wilson announced ... a new funding approach for hospitals....

"Beginning April 1 ... transfer payments to hospitals will be reduced by 5%....

"Transfers to hospitals will be reduced by \$365 million in year one, \$435 million in year two and \$507 million in year three."

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Beaches–East York, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Prue: I listened intently. I thank the Minister of Health, the member from Durham, the member from Timmins–James Bay and the member for Kitchener Centre.

Just a couple of comments. I, too, thank the Minister of Health for staying this evening and for listening to this extended debate. I thank him for his commitments to re-open this legislation and make some meaningful changes when this goes to the committee stage.

The member from Durham—I had the opportunity to listen to him and some of his colleagues last night around the Lakeridge debate. I'm hoping as well that they will continue in their efforts to help the good people of Durham.

Member from Timmins–James Bay: Yes, you can take me to the north, but not in blackfly season. Make sure it's after that.

Mr. Bisson: The fishing is better, though.

Mr. Prue: Okay.

The member from Kitchener Centre I've left the longest period of time, because one can talk about the whole range of health but it would be very difficult in 20 minutes to do so.

I try, as always, and perhaps I did not satisfy you, to confine my comments to the actual bill itself and what the bill is intending to do. In terms of the larger approach, it is a huge field. Health expenditures are nearly 50% of the budget of this province. We'll probably eclipse that 50% in short order over the next number of years unless something remarkable happens. It is a huge approach. There have been changes—some positive changes, some not-so-positive changes—that have taken place during the mandate of this government.

I don't know what else to tell you. I do, though, rather like the quote from 1996. I remember those days with a great deal of—

Mr. Bisson: Anger.

Mr. Prue: Anger—I don't think that "anger" is the right word. I was searching for the right word, but you gave me that one; thank you—a great deal of anger about what happened to the institutions that made this province and its people so great, to see them in many ways subjected to unnecessary and unwarranted reductions. Thank you for the history. It was worth reliving.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

2120

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): Thank you for giving me the chance and honour to enter the debate on Bill 171, the Health System Improvements Act.

I've been listening for a while to many of my colleagues speaking to the Minister of Health concerning Bill 171, and also the opposition. I know it's almost time, 20 minutes after 9 o'clock evening time, and hopefully many in my constituency have the parliamentary channel

open and can listen to us and listen to the debate because I believe it's a very important topic concerning not just the people of Ontario but all the people of Canada.

When we were watching the federal budget the other day, everyone was listening and paying attention to how much was going to be the portion going to health care for the provinces, especially the province of Ontario.

I want to tell you something very important. We on this side of the House believe strongly in public health. When we got elected in October 2003, we tried since that time to move the direction from one end to the other end, from the privatization direction to a public direction. We're trying to invest as much as we can in that direction in order to maintain it in the public domain and maintain it open and accessible for all the people who live in Ontario.

I know that it's a tough file. We are privileged and honoured in this province to have a minister who has the courage and the ability to deal with this file with accountability and honesty—and efficiently. I know that the Minister of Health worked day and night, seven days a week, in order to change the direction, in order to serve the people of Ontario and to maintain public health care in the public domain and accessible for all, and efficient and accountable.

We didn't fix health care in Ontario. I'm not going to come here, stand up and say, "Yes, we fixed it." We're not going to say, "Yes, we finished the job." We still have a lot of work ahead of us to do, and hopefully in the future we'll be able to fix that important file which concerns all of us in the province of Ontario.

I had the privilege on different occasions to serve on different bills and different committees which travelled the province of Ontario, different bills concerning health care, from Bill 8, to the LHINs, to the Drug Benefit Act, to Bill 140 on long-term care—and many different files opened across the province of Ontario. We try as much as possible to listen to the people of Ontario. We consult the people of Ontario, whatever we do, on a daily basis in order to get the whole issue and the right path and the right direction.

Not a long time ago, I attended a consultation session hosted by myself and my colleague for London North Centre, Deb Matthews, in conjunction with the LHIN in our region. I know many people think that the LHIN is not local. It is local. When we had a budget for health care of almost \$35 billion, we used to have a centralized office run from Queen's Park from the Ministry of Health, but now we have divided it into 14 units across the province of Ontario. Every jurisdiction has their own CEO and own chair. They can deal with it in conjunction with support from local hospitals, local health care agencies across the province of Ontario. During that consultation, we listened to a lot of people. Everyone came with a different proposal. We had nurses, we had doctors, we had the stakeholders. We had people, constituents, who came to listen, came to say what they thought about health care. Some people were happy and some people not.

I just received an e-mail from one of the constituents who was in that consultation. She belongs to a certain union. I know she wasn't pleased because it didn't go in the direction she wants. But in the end, we listened. We listened. I'm honoured and privileged to be a part of a government that listens to the people of Ontario, and especially the Minister of Health. We came to him on different occasions. We asked him for support for London, for the London Health Sciences Centre, for St. Joseph's Hospital. We explained to him, many different times—myself and the London team: Minister Chris Bentley, Minister Steve Peters and Deb Matthews—how much we need to balance the books of the London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's. After a while, after he sent many different people to London, he understood the importance of balancing the books and gave us the support. Not a long time ago he came personally to announce great support financially to the London hospitals: the London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's Hospital. That support means a lot to the patients of London. It means a lot to the people of our community and also to support community care access centres to clean up all the backlog from 2006 to start fresh in 2007. It also means a lot to the constituents of London, all of them, not just London-Fanshawe, my riding; for the whole city of London and the region. Also, not many people know that we serve almost 1.5 million people in our region. So it's important to strengthen our health care. It's very important to maintain it in the public domain, because the people of Ontario asked us to do so when they went and cast their votes in 2003.

When I hear the opposition talking about cutting the budget by \$2.5 billion, it's a great indication of what actions they want to take. They want to shift that action again from public to private health care. I think the people of the great province of Ontario are going to say no. They want to maintain a public domain, because the people work hard on a daily basis. We attract many factories, many companies to come and open in Ontario because we have public health care, because we invest in public health care.

I know that Bill 171 gives us a lot of tools to fix many different parts of health care, to make it accountable, to address many different needs. Some people don't want to go through regular, traditional health care; they want to go to homeopathy or kinesiology or physiotherapy or naturopathy treatment. This bill will address their needs.

Also, about water treatment, it belongs in the Ministry of Health because the Ministry of Health looks after the health of people. It's very important to include all the elements which we face in Ontario and contain them and control them in one direction: the health of the people of Ontario.

Also, not a long time ago—maybe a few weeks ago—I hosted four social workers who came to my office. They were asking me if I could send a message to the Minister of Health about being included in Bill 171. So, as a part of our consultations, we have a great minister who listens to the people. We explained the importance of including

social workers in the bill, and today and yesterday, through the Minister of Health, we got a great answer. He acknowledged the need for including those social workers in the bill and acknowledged the role of the social worker in our community, how much they play a role in preventing so many different things from happening in our community, a preventive measure which is important to all of us in order to lower the pressure on health care and free many acute beds and services and give them to the people who need them badly.

I think this bill is a great bill. It plays a pivotal role in our community, our government and our society because in the end we have one goal: to serve the people, to make sure that all the people who seek health care can get it. I know we have difficulties, but we have made improvements in many different areas and many different procedures: cataract surgery, hip and knee replacement, cardiac surgery, and many different things coming up very soon. I know the opposition doesn't like to hear that, but this is progress. We are open. We're talking about all these elements. We're not afraid to tackle the issues. We know we haven't finished yet. That's why we're going to keep working hard to achieve the goals which all of us are looking forward to in the future, but our goal is to maintain health care in the public domain, to continue

working alongside the good people of Ontario to maintain public health care and keep it accessible for all.

We're talking also about accessibility. In part of Bill 171, we're talking about the importance of linking people, the patients from the north and the west and the east, to the institutions where they can be treated. That's why we've put in a mechanism, a strategy, to link air and land ambulance all together, to answer the member for Beaches-East York's concerns. It's not just his concern but so many people's in Ontario. That's why the Minister of Health answered that question. Hopefully it will be addressed and the mechanism and strategy that we put in place will be good, not just for a certain area of the province but for all Ontarians. As he said, Toronto is not the centre of the universe; not even London, not even any location. It should be all of us working together, all these communities working together, from the north to the west, from the east to the south.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak. Hopefully, in the end, all the members of the House will support this bill, because it's a great bill.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 of the clock, Thursday morning, March 22.

The House adjourned at 2130.

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Jeudi 22 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 22 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 22 mars 2007

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CONDOMINIUM AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CONDOMINIUMS

Mr. Marchese moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Condominium Act, 1998 / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur les condominiums.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Marchese, pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It is a pleasure for me to speak to my bill, a bill that I believe is very timely. Some of you will know that we debated the Condominium Act—actually, that we didn't debate the Condominium Act very much—in 1998, which is a surprise to me, given the kind of reaction that I'm getting to this bill.

We had a Condominium Act in 1978, and there was debate—lots. In reviewing this whole process, I was a bit surprised that in 1998 we didn't engage very much in debate, we didn't have supporters or opponents coming to this Legislature saying, "Hold on. We need to review this bill." It puzzled me, because as I consulted people in my riding, we got an earful from many of the folks who responded to our questionnaire. We have had, in the last 10 years, an incredible boom in the condominium industry—incredible. According to Stats Canada, Toronto's population is only growing in the condominium corridors along the waterfront, downtown and Highway 401, and Toronto is the epicentre of the condo boom, with 17,000 new units being sold in 2005 alone. Other areas experiencing tremendous condominium growth are Kitchener, Waterloo and London—and, I suspect, many other parts. I'm obviously talking about where we are seeing an incredible boom, rather than where there is condominium growth in other areas. So there is growth across Ontario. In fact, 40% of all new housing is condominium-related, and so it isn't a surprise to me any

longer to find that there are a whole lot of condominium owners who are concerned about their relationship to developers in particular. So I want to thank many of the condominium owners who have responded to my questionnaire, responded to the bill that we have drafted, because many of them are looking for a voice. They think and they believe they are not being heard, and they're right. They are actually right in this regard. This bill is an attempt to address that problem and to address the growth and the lack of changes that have not kept up with that growth.

This bill congratulates and thanks many of the people who have worked with me, and I want to thank a couple of people who came here today. I know we have four names: Eva Koletar, Moti Flaster, Richard Hamilton and Yvon Piché. We also have two condominium owners who are just here today to witness this debate, and I thank them for coming. I thank particularly Audrey Loeb, who is a condominium lawyer, who had a lot to do with drafting the bill in 1978. She has tremendous experience in this field. In fact, she's one of the few who are actively engaged. She would have loved to have seen changes earlier and is happy that someone took an interest to introduce some changes today.

We are bringing in standard provisions for declarations, good-faith disclosure and a review board with review officers who can do much of the work that I'm about to talk about in terms of the major changes that we are proposing to the Condominium Act.

Condominium owners need disclosure packages that are clear and straightforward, declarations with standard provisions, more effective ways to enforce the act, and faster and cheaper ways to solve disputes, and mostly they need to be protected from shoddy development practices, shoddy workmanship, surprise fees and sometimes complicated and unclear disclosures by developers. Our amendments to the Condominium Act are as a result of the outreach we have done with many, and we hope that we will get the support of other MPPs in this House as we debate this bill.

Let me go through some of the problems. I want to start by quoting some of the people who wrote to us around issues of fair disclosure and standard provisions. Hana from Toronto says, "The sales office representing the developer did not advise buyers of upcoming construction."

Right now, disclosure packages are not clear. Developers imply they're making commitments they are not actually making and, as a prize, they get great latitude

from the courts on a regular basis. Courts are continually awarding on the side of developers, telling new condo owners they should have looked at the fine print.

Here's another quote from John Doe from Ontario: "I'm concerned about developers and 'hidden' clauses, and having to sue or fight or pay to get out of contracts that the developers make."

We know that condo owners, on their own, prospective condo buyers, cannot do line-by-line comparisons of the disclosure documents they get in the original agreements versus final disclosure documents they receive on occupancy. Lawyers are paid thousands of dollars by developers to make these documents complicated, often obscure, often vague; sometimes deliberately so. These are thousands of dollars that condominium owners have to pay to deal with these problems, thousands of dollars they cannot afford to pay.

John from Toronto says, "We were provided with vague explanations like—contractual expenses, utilities, etc." This bill, as a solution, says it will bring in standard provisions for declarations. To make sure there are no surprises, declarations will be standard so buyers can read them themselves and will not be bamboozled by legalese or distorted or contorted wording. All consumers deserve to know what they're getting when they make that purchase, and condo owners should not be the exception.

Here's Reshma from Toronto: "After living in my condo for eight months, my condo fees jumped up by 25%. For a 600-square foot condo I pay well over \$300 in condo fees. I can't wait to get out of the condo."

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This bill is bringing in good-faith disclosure, similar to that required in the Franchise Disclosure Act. Buying a home is too important a prospect to play "hide the deal-breaker" with modest-income purchasers, which make up the majority of the market. Good-faith disclosure can go a long way to eliminate the fights between developers and purchasers. Developers will think twice before playing games, faced with a prospect of having to pay damages when they fail to disclose.

A review board: "This condo experience," says Harry from Toronto, "in front of CN tower has been highly disappointing. As a buyer, I felt no support from the developer or Taron or the city."

Condo dwellers deserve an office that is a one-stop-shop that will give them the information, that will advocate on their behalf, help them settle disputes and support them in their dealing with developers. That is why this bill is introducing the review board. The review board will advocate on behalf of condominium owners. They will carry the flag for them. It will also be available to give them the information they desperately require.

Nancy from Collingwood: "Someone must enforce condo law. Who enforces the law? The courts. Not very encouraging."

Our bill will have review officers who can resolve disputes between owners and boards, condos and developers, and condos and property managers, cheaper

and more effectively. Right now, unit owners have to spend thousands of dollars and a long time solving problems with other unit owners, their boards and their property managers. If we don't bring in review officers, no one will be there to make sure that the act is enforced except the courts. That is unacceptable, and we know how expensive that is.

Condominium lawyer Audrey Loeb says: "For a lawyer to charge what they really should charge to do a thorough review of documents, each purchaser of a condo would probably pay \$3,000 to \$5,000—just to review the documents." It's just too prohibitive, she says.

That's another reason we're bringing in review officers. They can review documentation from developers and ensure fair and clear disclosure. The review board could also set up a panel for more complicated disputes and advise the minister or the assembly on behalf of the condominium owners.

What's not in the bill? Several other things. Some of the problems in condominiums escape the confines of the act and touch on general issues with building and construction that must be reviewed.

"Soundproofing is terrible. I can hear all drainage from the unit above me, in addition to loud noises such as music or loud voices," Connie from Toronto says.

The standards for sound insulation in the building code are inadequate, and better soundproofing requirements would go a long way to make condo living quieter. That doesn't deal with this bill, but this is another issue that must be dealt with under the Building Code Act.

These are other issues people have raised. We know there are thousands of condominium owners who are desperately looking for help. We believe this bill will begin to address many of the concerns they have raised, and if other members have other questions, we can deal with that when this bill goes through second reading, as a way of making this bill better and stronger.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's always a pleasure to engage in a debate with my colleague, and if I may cross party lines and say my friend, mon ami, the member for Trinity–Spadina. Nobody will ever suggest that the member is anything short of enthusiastic in the advocacy of the issues for which he stands. But should a bill like this be successful, this Legislature and the people of Ontario are going to have to live with it for a long time.

Let's separate the advocacy and look long and hard at the cold facts with which Ontario would have to live, if this bill is passed. It's hard to make a case for passing this bill. The member says that condo owners are "looking for a voice," to use his words. The bill's outcome would inevitably mean higher fees, but not a better voice. The fact is that the current condo act already does the things that the member would implement, in duplicate or in triplicate, with the passage of this bill.

The member quotes a number of people with complaints, and I don't doubt the veracity, the sincerity of these complaints. But it might have been better for this

debate if the member for Trinity–Spadina had explained some of the measures that he proposes.

Good legislation ought to help condo owners, not hurt them. Ontario has already asked Taron to review the current delayed closing provisions on new condominiums. Taron has been asked to ensure that those provisions are clear, simple and certain for consumers and builders to comprehend and work with; they're already doing what the member has suggested. Taron has been asked to ensure that contractual language is balanced and fair to both consumers and builders—again, substantially what the member had asked. Taron has been asked to ensure that condos are capable of being administered in a modern and efficient matter—substantially what the member has asked. Ontario is looking forward to Taron's final recommendations being implemented later this year, faster than the passage of the member's bill.

Now, what are some of the current provisions in the condo act that already protect consumers, measures that are substantially the same as what the member for Trinity–Spadina is proposing? Well, there's already a mechanism making it mandatory—not optional, not a suggestion, but mandatory—for unitholders who have disputes with their condo board and their condo corporation to go through mediation or arbitration if the disagreement involves bylaws or declarations. That's substantially what the member is proposing.

Subsection 132(4) of the existing condo act reads, and I'll quote it exactly: "Every declaration shall be deemed to contain a provision that the corporation and the owners agree to submit a disagreement between the parties with respect to the declaration, bylaws or rules to mediation and arbitration." It would duplicate what's essentially already there. The mediator would be selected by the parties—largely what the member proposes; subsection 132(1) of the condo act. The mediator's expenses shall be paid by both parties under the current condo act—substantially what the member has proposed. Subsection 132(6) of the existing condo act says, "Each party shall pay the share of the mediator's fees and expenses that,

"(a) the settlement specifies, if a settlement is obtained; or

"(b) the mediator specifies in the notice stating that the mediation has failed, if the mediation fails."

Again, that's substantially what the member has proposed.

I could go on at great length on this. For example, in providing information, the government already provides information to condo corporations and owners of condominium units—substantially what the bill has proposed. The Ministry of Government Services, consumer protection branch, already answers telephone inquiries from the public on all issues related to the Condominium Act, 1998—substantially what the member has proposed. The Ministry of Government Services website already offers condominium-related information, including a printable document called Quick Tips for Buying a Condominium—substantially what the member advocates. As well, the Ministry of Government Services publishes

a brochure entitled Condominium Living: Tips for Buyers and Owners—substantially what the member would propose.

Speaker, I'd like to share this debate with some of the my colleagues. I'm going to wrap it up there and thank the member for having brought the measures to the fore. In his 17 years, it's nice to see that this is the first time he has spoken up for condo owners. I appreciate the sincerity of his bill, and I'm having a hard time understanding the need for it.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): Perhaps if the member who just spoke read the bill, he might understand the need for it. I can say that the member from Trinity–Spadina does have a lot of condominium owners in his riding, and obviously he has represented that riding very well over the past 17 years.

I went over his bill, in terms of what it requires. It has three simple themes. The first part is the declaration, which is something that has to be put forth by the condo owner. It's a very fundamental part of any transaction. We have to keep in mind here that what the member from Mississauga West was speaking of was, there's a mediation process, there's an arbitration process. What the member is trying to do here is get away from litigation. I know Liberals like litigation, but the bottom line is that the member is proposing a declaration that will have to be consistent and comply with regulations. Now, he hasn't put that in there yet, but I know he's going to push the government to do that. What he wants to do is to make sure there is no arbitration or mediation, so when a big developer decides to take a sledgehammer to a small consumer, that's not going to happen. Why can't we make sure that the declaration is understandable? It has to be in accordance with the law. The reason he's putting it into regulation is because things change. There are different manoeuvres that are made by the big developer that may not be seen by the small consumer, so having regulations allows that small consumer and the government to adapt to market conditions. When the Condominium Act was changed in 1998, it hadn't been changed for years before that; now we're almost 10 years past that. What the member is saying is, "Listen, there's a lot of litigation on the declaration. There has been an unprecedented boom with respect to litigation and the condominiums being built."

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I was speaking to a person by the name of Yvon Piché yesterday, and he gave me some information. He says there are 8,636 corporations registered as condominiums. That's a staggering figure. It means that we have to be very aware that this is a growth industry. I think everybody knows that condominium sales and the building of condominiums, especially in Toronto, has been unprecedented. Certainly there are some up in my riding, but not anything like what's going on in Toronto and what will be going on in the Vaughan region, which will be unprecedented, with respect to condominium building.

The first theme that the member is putting forth is that the declaration, which is a fundamental document in

terms of protecting consumer rights, has to be reviewed, has to be implemented. He is proposing a simple measure to make sure that the litigation is gone from that process and that the government of the day can adapt to the changing marketplace.

The second part of what he's proposing is from a practical point of view. He's saying, "Listen, let's keep it out of the courts." You have to go to the courts to deal with certain types of disputes with respect to condominiums, in terms of damages, misrepresentations, things that are happening while you're living in that particular unit.

He did make one drafting error that I picked up, and I know he's going to change it if the Liberals don't kill the bill today—and I get the sense they're going to try to kill it here today. If the member wants to make the change, he's going to have to make it when we get into committee. In subsection 133(2), he should have put in the provision that he put in earlier, deleting the reference to the Superior Court and substituting "the review board." That's a key section, because that's the one that allows the court to deal with all kinds of different remedies. It's a very important section, and I think the member appreciates my comments on that because, quite frankly, it's going to have to be put in there.

That's the second part of the bill. The member is proposing that we keep any of these situations facing a condo owner out of the court system, whether it's a structural defect, a problem with the contingency fund.

I was speaking to people in the insurance industry. A good friend of mine, Brian Brethet, up in the Barrie area, provided me with the types of coverages they offer in a condo package, and it's staggering. There are two pages of the types of condo coverage they offer, ranging from a unit contingency deductible, coverage limit, loss assessment for property, additional living expenses, satellite dish damage by wind, sewer backup, water escape extension, outdoor trees, lawns—all this insurance that, obviously, if the system was working, you wouldn't need. The bottom line is that there are almost two pages of insurance coverage that people are offered in the condo owners' section for insurance. Obviously, there's a problem, and that costs money. It costs real money to deal with those types of problems, and sometimes you're not going to win in court. It costs a lot of money to go to court. You've got to get a good lawyer, you've got to make sure you get your case represented, and you're up against a big condo owner. Who do you think has got the best expertise? Who do you think has got the money and the bankroll to take it all the way?

That also applies to the comments from the member from Mississauga West regarding the mediation and arbitration. The condo owners will have a full-time lawyer on staff to deal with these things; they've got the expertise. But the condo member is faced with a situation for the first time, having bought the unit. They're not going to have the expertise to go in there and say, "I'm going to take you on. I've got a lawyer here." And why should they have to pay for a lawyer?

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It could be the owner of the Barrie Colts.

Mr. Tascona: Not the Colts. We don't want to get on the subject of the Barrie Colts, even though I love them and they're starting off against Brampton on Saturday. I know the member from Peterborough is passionate about the Petes, but the Colts knocked them out this year. I appreciated that.

Getting back to the point, the court system is not going to work for the condominium members. I don't know whether I want to go as far as the member from Trinity-Spadina in terms of what he's proposing. I think we need to have a hard look at that in terms of, what are the real problems that this review board is going to deal with? Because he made that drafting error, I think he's going to have to revisit the type of remedies he's proposing. Maybe that was just an oversight and what he wants to ensure is that the review board provides the type of remedies a court could provide.

If that's the case, I think we all have to be open to having a review of the condominium situation. The fact is that it has been 10 years of unprecedented condominium building in Toronto, and the growth you're going to find out in Vaughan is going to be unbelievable, because in Vaughan the builders have had some vision and they decided they're going to—just go down Highway 7 and go down Rutherford Road. You would not believe the condominium building that will be going on out there. Obviously, it's going to be a very attractive investment for the people who have put that forth, and that's to their benefit. They're going to make money out of that. All we're talking about here is to make sure there's fairness for the consumer who buys.

The other part the member is talking about is fair dealing: "A duty of fair dealing is imposed on ... every declarant in its dealings with a corporation, owner or purchaser; and ... every corporation in its dealings with an owner or purchaser." And "a corporation, owner or purchaser has a right of action for damages against a person who breaches the duty of fair dealing." I'm not really sure what the member is getting at there with "right of action." If he's talking going back into the court system—I think he should be clear, because I'm really not sure if that's what he's proposing. Maybe he can respond to me, when he gets his reply, what he intends.

Anyone who reads the Toronto Star knows there's a condominium section. There are good articles in there every week advising consumers about different projects and different things to be looking at. There was an article on February 10, 2007, written by Bob Aaron, special to the Star. He writes on real estate. He was very helpful to me when I was pushing to get the government to change their approach to mortgage fraud and to help people like Susan Lawrence and Mr. Reviczky, to move and make sure that mortgage fraud wasn't something that would be plaguing us in the future. The government, after being embarrassed many a time in the Toronto Star—to the Toronto Star's credit, it made the government move to protect the consumers with respect to mortgage fraud.

In this article, though, he talks about a situation involving Tarion, where the client refuses to sign the extension agreement. This is a situation where “a client calls and tells me”—Mr. Aaron being a lawyer—“that his or her builder is running behind schedule with the house or condominium and has requested that an agreement be signed to extend the closing date.” You’d think this would be fairly straightforward, but it does have notice provisions required and there are rules with respect to Tarion. This went to litigation, of course, because the builder felt they could take advantage of that particular consumer. The consumer obviously was looking for a compensation claim as a result of the extension of the closing. The builder was saying that by agreeing to the extension, they were releasing their right to any compensation. Can you get that? Here you are giving the builder the right to extend the closing because they’re delayed. The fine print says, “If you give me the extension, you release your right to compensation.” Now, who in their right mind would do that, if they had been fully informed of what was going on? I’m going to give you an extension. You’re going to put me out because you haven’t been able to keep up with the date we agreed on. If I give you that extension, I lose my right to compensation, whereas if I don’t give you the extension, I get compensation.

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So this went to the Divisional Court. The compensation—get this—was for \$4,920, and the cost to deal with it, by the time they got to Divisional Court and finished up, was \$8,700, double what they were going after. So obviously it’s in the builder’s interest to put them through that. But the Divisional Court made it clear that “where a builder has given short notice of delayed closing to a purchaser, and the purchaser is entitled to compensation as a result, ‘it should be incumbent on the builder to obtain an acknowledgment in writing from the purchaser when signing an amendment for the extension of an occupancy date that it is understood the purchaser is waiving his or her right to compensation.’...”

“The law is now clear. If a builder of a new home or condominium wants to extend an occupancy or closing date by amending a purchase agreement, it must disclose and obtain a written waiver from the buyer to any delayed-occupancy claims.”

Now, wouldn’t you think that would be straightforward and that wouldn’t have to be litigated? But it had to be litigated because of what happened in this court.

“The Divisional Court has clearly pronounced that the law governing the Tarion program is ‘consumer protection legislation and should be given broad and liberal interpretation.’

“This is good news for others consumers in the same boat as Markey. If the warranty period has not expired, consumers who have already closed but signed an amendment moving the closing date may still be able to apply for delayed closing compensation.”

That’s a typical example of the type of situation you can run into in a hot and overheated market, in a market

where, quite frankly, there’s a great demand for this type of housing, which is condominiums, because it’s more affordable and may suit the lifestyle of the individual who wants that type of building. But it’s obviously the wave of the future. And in terms of the government’s approach to development, they want high intensity; they are promoting high-intensity building, which means condominium building is what they are approving and that’s what they want done. So if that’s what we’re dealing with here, in the current market of condominiums, where a government is promoting it, the government should at least make sure that the Condominium Act is responsive to the market and that everything that has to be done to protect the consumer and make it fair with respect to dealing with a condominium owner doesn’t have to be litigated. It should be in the legislation. We should be able to do something here today to make sure that a simple thing such as a declaration is very straightly set out, responsive to the market conditions, and that the consumer doesn’t have to go the route of litigation.

I don’t believe the Tarion approach is in favour of the consumer. The fact of the matter is that the Tarion situation of mediation-arbitration favours the builder, because they have expertise on staff; they have the knowledge to deal with a one-time buyer.

Also, with respect to dealing with the review board, there’s some merit there; it has to be looked at.

But I’m in favour of an overall review. Obviously, after 10 years this legislation needs to be reviewed to respond to market conditions.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I want to first of all say that, from the comments made by the member from Mississauga West, anybody listening to this debate or reading it later in Hansard will see that this Liberal government is firmly on the side of the developer and against the rights of condo owners. The question is, who is on the side of condo owners? Clearly, our member from Trinity–Spadina has risen to that challenge with his Bill 185.

I want to focus on one aspect of what it means to be a condo owner right now, since I have a number of developments in my own riding of Parkdale–High Park. I hear, and I know we all hear in our constituency offices, complaints about increased maintenance fees. Now, here is the bind of the condo owner: Do you speak up about increased maintenance fees, some in the order of 33% in some of my developments, and risk the resale value of your unit? Do you, as you’ve heard the member from Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford say, go out and hire a high-priced lawyer, who is never going to be high-priced enough in terms of what the developer can afford? There are all sorts of factors mitigating against the complaints of the condo owner, legitimate complaints. A law not enforced is not a law. The member for Trinity–Spadina is simply trying to redress this situation, and it is a situation that is real. We hear from condo owners all the time. So again, what we’re talking about here and what our member from Trinity–Spadina is speaking about is

enforcement of laws, a review board that will act on behalf of the condo owners in a way that makes that review and the laws that we already have real. It reminds me of employment standards—that's my portfolio—where only 1% of all employers ever get a visit from an inspector. We don't have employment standard laws if that's the case. We don't have protection laws for condo unit owners if we do not have something like this review board that stands up for them. Again, usually young owners particularly who are investing in less expensive units are using all of their money simply to buy the unit. They don't have money left over to hire a lawyer to fight a developer. They don't have money left over to risk even complaining, in some instances, about the problems in their building, because they might have to sell that unit in short order or might want to sell that unit.

My husband and I actually rented a condo unit from a friend of ours as we were waiting for our house to be readied. In the period of time that we rented this unit, his maintenance fees went up 33% in this new development. Our rent went up 2.8%. So this is an across-the-board problem. There's no redress for condo unit owners who are up against the cut-and-run attitude of the developer who builds shoddy developments that of course then result in increased maintenance fees.

So I just wanted to speak out on behalf of the bill, and I know my colleague is going to speak out as well, and thank the member from Trinity-Spadina for having the courage to stand up for condo unit owners, which clearly this Liberal government does not do.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): Prior to the previous comments from the member from Parkdale-High Park, I was looking up at the younger people in the audience today and I was thinking, you know what? They probably hit the Legislature on one of the better days. It's when the partisanship gets put aside and private members come to this House and debate legislation that is put forward, and put forward their own views. Some of the cheap shots, in my opinion, that were just taken were unwarranted, and from the murmurings that I heard around my seat here, she may have sunk the member's chance for getting this bill passed.

I think that, despite the fact that the bill was put on our desks just yesterday, which is pretty unusual for a private member's bill, most of us were doing our best to try to get our minds around the provisions of that bill, to see if it is supportable or not, to see if it's the sort of thing that we should, even if we don't understand all the ramifications of it now, allow to move forward or not.

I don't know what the intent of some of the comments was. If they were to somehow take some political advantage of what I think is a well-intentioned bill, then they were done at the wrong place and they were done at the wrong time. I don't think it served the members well, and it has probably given the young people in the audience an example of what many people say is wrong with this place and needs to change.

Having said that, I am a former condo owner. In my early 20s my wife and I, before we had children, moved

to Oakville. It was a matter of affordability for us. The only place we could afford was a condominium. Every so often, we would walk by this meeting room and we would see a lot of older people meeting. We knew that we didn't want to be a part of that meeting. We were "double income, no kids." The last thing we wanted to do was to sit in on a condo board meeting. We were still having fun. But thank God there were people who were doing that. Thank God there were people who were, on a voluntary basis, looking after my investment for me. So for all those people around Ontario, all the volunteers who sit on condo boards, I personally would like to extend my thanks, and I'm sure they have the thanks and the gratitude of all members of this Legislature.

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Since that time, I've moved on to private home ownership, but I remember my days in the condo quite well. My biggest concern as a condo owner was not where I went for a debate on whether the board had done something right or wrong; it was the amount of my fees. It was how much I had to pay, over and above the mortgage principal, interest and taxes, as condo fees on a monthly basis from the two of us, who at that point in time were not earning a whole lot of money.

So the first question that comes up on the bill is, who is going to fund the review board? Is it another Ontario Film Review Board? Is it another OMB? Is it a Human Rights Commission? Is it a rent review tribunal? When people around this province are asking us to run government more efficiently, to spend their tax dollars more wisely, I think at least the question should be raised: Who is going to pay for this review board? It seems to me that the only place that it can come from is either from tax dollars or directly from the fees of condominium owners in the province. Maybe that's a good thing. Maybe somebody should fund this review board. Maybe we need it. But I think we have to be honest and we have to be upfront as to who is going to carry the bill for this review board. That's one big question that I think needs to be asked before this bill is allowed to proceed, and perhaps the member will have some answers when he stands up again to summarize this. Is it government that pays for it? Is it the builders?

Certainly, the new-found interest in this issue is timely. I think government should on a regular basis review all of the legislation it has. I think we need to look at ways that we can improve bills; I think we need to look at ways that legislation can be made better. But it seems to me in this case that we've got a group of people out there in the province of Ontario that could be severely affected by the passage of this bill, perhaps in a positive way. Perhaps there are problems out there that need to be solved, and perhaps a review board could go some way to doing that. But definitely there will be a cost. People on the review board will be paid; the review board will be staffed. Offices will be opened. Tax dollars will be expended. At the very least, even with the short notice this bill has received in being open to all members of this Legislature, very clearly that question needs to be

answered by the proponent of this bill: Who is going to have their taxes raised, their condo fees raised? Who is going to pay for this review?

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I just wanted to start off by thanking the member for Trinity–Spadina for bringing forward this legislation. There's no question that legislation to clarify rights, to simplify the interrelationship between developers and members of condos and their boards, is needed. If we in this area, in Toronto and the greater Toronto region, are going to have intensification, a denser city, we are most certainly going to have a lot more condominiums. In the extent to which condominium ownership is made simpler, clearer, less hazardous, we remove a block, an impediment, to that intensification.

Now, what has been said by one other speaker was that in fact things are fine and he didn't understand why this legislation was coming forward. I'm here to say that, frankly, not all is fine. Talk to people who have moved into condominiums, people who may not have owned a home before in their lives, people who may have owned a single-family dwelling but have not actually had to deal with the complexities of a board, of a membership. This whole process is one that does call for a review, does call for amendments along the lines of what has been proposed by the member for Trinity–Spadina.

When people come to grips with these purchases, they need simple, clear documents in English that they understand on a daily basis. That's why standardization of language makes tremendous sense. Make sure that people don't have to turn their brains inside out to try and understand these documents. Make it standard; make it clear. We have to level that playing field so that purchasers have the tools at their disposal, without having to spend many thousands of dollars, to understand what they're getting into.

They need, as has been said by the member, good-faith disclosure. They should have all the facts at their fingertips so that they can make a clear, rational decision for what will be for many people the single biggest investment in their lives. They deserve, at the very least, clear disclosure of all the factors that are going to affect the value of that condominium, all the factors that are going to affect their enjoyment of the condominium and all the factors that will affect resale.

I've had opportunity myself, as a property manager, to fight with developers. Before I was elected to Toronto city council in 1990, I was a property manager in the co-op housing sector. For the last eight years that I was a property manager, I was engaged in litigation with the developer that had built the building that I was managing. You get good developers and you get bad developers. The developer that had been hired to build to the co-operative housing building or complex that I managed, unfortunately, was not a great developer. We had crumbling stucco walls, so that the people had rainwater running through their living rooms in October and November. We had basements that were flooding. We had upper units in an eight-story apartment building that

were flooded in heavy rains. We had wiring that was dangerous. This was all new construction. We spent hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting that developer. In the end, the developer spent us out of court. We didn't have enough money to pursue the legal action and we had to eat what was put on the plate. We had to pay for those repairs. We weren't able to get satisfaction from the courts.

Frankly, if a co-operative corporation that brings in millions of dollars a year in revenue has difficulty carrying forward a legal battle, without any doubt individual condominium owners are going to have tremendous difficulty carrying forward a battle.

We know that in membership situations in co-operatives and in condominiums there are will be times when the members and the boards will be at odds. Frankly, without having to lose your shirt going to court, to have an independent agent who is available come in and arbitrate or mediate between the parties would mean that disputes are settled far more quickly, far more simply than if people have to rely for years or thousands of dollars for courts and lawyers to get through the issues, to settle the issues.

The member is doing this province a service. He is trying to simplify the whole process of condominium ownership, trying to protect those purchasers so that we don't go through some of the conflicts that have been seen in other jurisdictions. In Vancouver, in the 1990s, we went through horrendous problems with the quality of the buildings. In Toronto, we haven't seen a problem as sharp as they've seen in Vancouver. But we know that with lack of good legislation, you can get severe conflict, you can get people losing their shirts. So I'd like to thank the member for coming forward and taking the next step in Ontario to make life better for ordinary people who are just trying to buy a home, a home to give them shelter, a home to live their lives.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): To reiterate what some of the previous speakers said, I too appreciate the intention of what the member from Trinity–Spadina is trying to do.

Many of us in this building today have condominium buildings that we deal with. We have some good condo corporations running them and we have some bad condo corporations running them. I know that in my previous life as a city councillor—and even continuing now as a member of provincial Parliament—once in a while I would get a call from a condo owner who would complain that they weren't advised, didn't know about increases in fees or didn't agree to something being done to the building which caused their condo fees to go up.

1050

This was tabled yesterday, and I'm trying to get my head around this as to whether or not to support it. There are some good intentions here, clearly. The main concern that I would have is the cost function that was brought up by the member from Oakville: Who will pay the additional costs of having to do this review board? Who would run it, who would staff it, who would pay for that

board? Because once it's created, it could become quite large. I can think of an example of a condo building where just one person is unhappy for some reason, has a grudge against the condo board, is one of the owners and is unhappy with the way the board functions. So perhaps they would use this mechanism or this review board as a way to hold up the rest of the owners of the condo building and make them pay more in condo fees, by holding them up and forcing some type of litigation or arbitration to take place which could last for years. It could have perhaps nothing to do with the real problems.

Right now, it's the people who have an interest in the building, the actual owners, who form the condominium corporation. They are the ones, as the member from Oakville mentioned earlier, who get together once a month or once in a while to discuss problems with the building. Some that I've seen in my experience are very good at resolving problems and taking care of issues, and some are not that good. The present bill that we have, the Condominium Act, 1998, provides for a system and a way to protect condo unit owners through arbitration, through a system that's in place. Ultimately, if the person is unhappy, they can go to court and deal with it that way.

Any time you make a change, the question you have to ask is, what are the costs of that change? How much more will it cost to make that change? That's my concern. Certainly, as I said, there are some bad condo corporations—I wouldn't say they're bad, but they've had problems dealing with some of the issues in their building and have caused some of the owners in the building to be unhappy, and they end up coming to me as their local elected representative to try to resolve their problems. You know, somebody could get hit with a bill saying they have to pay 10%, 20% or 30% more on their condo fees and they feel it's unjust.

Those are my concerns: the cost and the fact that a condo owner in the building could perhaps take advantage of the new tribunal and try to use it as a way to get back at or to try to hold hostage either the condo board itself or all of the owners in the condo building. That just might be the way things work.

But all in all, I think the intention is good. I wait to see how others speak on the issue. Again, I look forward to—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Further debate? The member for—Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese: From Trinity-Spadina, because you're not allowed to name me. Thank you, Speaker.

Just a couple of things in response to what people have said: The members from Oakville and Mississauga West mentioned my newfound interest, as they say. I understand what they're saying. The newfound interest is based on the fact that I have a lot of condominium owners in my riding. We consulted them last year, and as a result of that consultation we got a lot of feedback. Based on that feedback, we thought it was a very timely and useful thing to introduce this bill. If that's a newfound interest, then it's a newfound interest. I'm not sure how you find a new interest when you bring forth

new suggestions or proposals and new laws, but that was my newfound interest.

Mr. Flynn: We're okay with that.

Mr. Marchese: I'm glad. I'm glad the member from Oakville just spoke to the young people about how other people do politics but he doesn't. It is amusing to see how you can do that, member from Oakville. For someone who can switch parties that easily, I suppose—

The Deputy Speaker: Would the member take his chair just for a moment. For the benefit of those watching, I will remind our members that we debate through the Chair.

Mr. Marchese: Through you, Speaker, the member from Oakville just scared the kids away. I can't believe it. Then he raises the issue about who will fund this review board. He doesn't talk about whether or not this review board is useful, is an important body to have. His main question—including the member from Scarborough Southwest—is the cost; not the usefulness or the importance of such a review board, but the cost. He doesn't worry about the condominium owners, who at the moment, when dealing with definitions around declarations where the owners have no clue about declarations, which is the constitution of the condominium corporation, have to go to a lawyer and pay \$3,000, \$5,000 to understand what the definition is of a declaration. He's got no problem with that cost. So when the condo owner has to pay that kind of legal fee, that's okay by way of a cost because the condominium owner should absorb that cost.

The point is that condominium owners pay incredible amounts of money to understand the declaration contained within that building. We think it's undue, excessive pressure and cost that you put on a condominium owner. It's not necessary. You can deal with the cost. I understand the member saying he doesn't want to pick it up as a government. So clearly, there is only one other option: that condominium owners pitch into it. That's the other way to do it. It was proposed in 1978 and there was obviously no agreement with that, so it never happened; the review board never happened. But is the member willing to discuss the possibility of a review board as being a good thing and having review officers deal with differences with condominium owners and the developers, or is he in agreement that these condominium owners should go and litigate and pay legal fees and go to court? Because that's the only other option that's left: Leave it as is and force the condominium owner to go to the courts.

We are trying to propose a body of people, with review officers, who could solve problems faster and cheaply. Could some individual condo owner take this board hostage? I don't see how they could do that. The member from Scarborough Southwest raises this as a spectre, as a fear of sorts. I don't understand how it could happen. Some condominium owner takes this issue on, a review person deals with it, and it's done. I don't know what more might happen. I don't know how they could take hostage such a review board or review officers. I

don't see it. He is a lawyer. Maybe he sees something I don't. The point is that declarations vary from building to building and they are expensive, time-consuming, and condo owners feel they have no one to turn to.

Tarion is not the answer for condominium owners. They are not there to defend condominium owners. They don't deal with that kind of problem. That's not, historically, what they have done. But the member from Mississauga West proposes that as a solution, including other consumer organizations. They do not exist. Condominium owners are looking for someone, a review board—I was going to read what a review board does.

“(a) advising and assisting the public in matters relating to condominiums;

“(b) establishing a panel to mediate or arbitrate disputes between

“(i) a declarant and a corporation

“(c) disseminating information for the purpose of educating and advising corporations and unit owners concerning condominium matters and the financial, operating and management practices of corporations.”

That's what the board does. It's not complicated. It's easy. You can easily take this issue to a committee and debate it. If you didn't discuss it in your caucuses—because we all do—if you didn't get that chance to discuss it to your caucuses, we can discuss it in committee.

As to the issue Mr. Tascona raises around the right to damages, section 133, this is what it says, because I've had a chance to get it:

“A corporation or an owner may make an application to the Superior Court of Justice to recover damages from a declarant for any loss sustained as a result of relying on a statement or on information that the declarant is required to provide under this act if the statement or information,

“(a) contains a material statement or material information that is false, deceptive or misleading.”

1100

We believe that should stay. We believe that section should stay because our bill reinforces that particular section.

This is an attempt to deal with some of the questions that were raised, but we are dealing with three matters: making sure that the declarations are standard across the board so you don't have to have a declaration. The constitutions of a corporation vary from one building to the other. It's shouldn't be that way. We should have good-faith disclosure, duty of fair dealing. That's a legal obligation of lawyers, and that's a good thing. We should have a review board with review officers to settle disputes cheaply and faster.

This is useful for condominium owners. It isn't something that I think we should be opposing outright. Take it to the committee and debate it, then bring the condominium owners and developers to the committee so we can hear their views. It shouldn't be something that should frighten the members, for God's sake. I'm urging some of you Liberals to take an independent position on this matter and support this bill.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LE MOIS DE L'HISTOIRE DES NOIRS

Mr. Balkissoon moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 182, An Act to name February in each year Black History Month / Projet de loi 182, Loi visant à désigner le mois de février de chaque année comme Mois de l'histoire des Noirs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): I'm extremely proud today to rise and speak to Bill 182, Black History Month Act, 2007.

February is universally recognized as Black History Month, a month dedicated to celebrating the contributions made by African-Canadians. As the member for Scarborough–Rouge River, a riding formerly held by Mr. Alvin Curling, the first African-Canadian provincial cabinet minister and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, I'm pleased to put forward this legislation.

The origins of Black History Month can be traced back to 1929, when Harvard-educated black historian Carter G. Woodson founded Negro History Week to celebrate this history, contributions and culture of African-Americans.

Fifty years later, during the American bicentennial celebrations in 1979, it was expanded to become National Black History Month. The official recognition in Canada came in the early 1950s, when the Canadian Negro Women's Association successfully petitioned Toronto city council. It was not until the 1970s that the council declared February to be known as Black History Month, in part due to the lobbying of the newly formed Ontario Black History Society.

In January 1993, provincial recognition was given when Lieutenant Governor Hal Jackman issued a proclamation to recognize the 200th anniversary of the passage of legislation prohibiting the importation of slaves into Upper Canada and providing for the gradual abolition of slavery.

December 14, 1995, marked national recognition when Dr. Jean Augustine, the first African-American woman elected to the Parliament of Canada, and subsequently the first African-Canadian federal cabinet minister, requested and received unanimous consent to recognize February as Black History Month.

African-Canadians have had a presence in Canada that dates back further than Samuel de Champlain's first voyage down the St. Lawrence River. However, this part of Canadian history has largely been untold.

According to the 2001 census by Statistics Canada, over 593,000 Canadians identify themselves as black, with the majority of them living in the GTA, Montreal, Ottawa and Halifax.

Today's African-Canadians are largely of Caribbean origin, but also include a growing population from the

African continent and smaller numbers from the Latin American countries.

In celebration of Black History Month, a replica of the historic Underground Railroad Buxton Liberty Bell has been on display since February 14, 2007, for the first time at Queen's Park. In the 1800s, the Buxton settlement represented safety and freedom for hundreds of American slaves escaping through the Underground Railroad.

With 2007 being the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, I believe it is fitting that we make a point of recognizing February of each year as Black History Month. It provides an opportunity for all Ontarians to celebrate the rich history, culture and heritage of the black community. Ontarians can recall with pride that the first legislation in the British Empire to limit slavery was introduced and passed by our first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe. In 1851, at the First Convention of Coloured Freemen held outside the United States, at Toronto's St. Lawrence Hall, Canada was declared to be the best place in the world for black people to live.

It is important to remember individuals such as Mary Anne Shadd, an educator, newspaper publisher and abolitionist who started the first racially integrated school in Canada, and who was the first female editor, establishing the Provincial Freeman in Windsor, Ontario; and Henry Bibb, a black abolitionist who co-founded the anti-slavery society in 1851 at the St. Lawrence Hall, who established the first black newspaper in Canada, called the Voice of the Fugitive. There was also William Peyton Hubbard, who in 1894 became the first black council member elected to Toronto city council and was re-elected as a council member for 13 successive elections. He served on the board of control and as acting mayor on several occasions.

There have been many distinguished members of the African-Canadian community who have represented their constituents in this chamber, including: Leonard Braithwaite, the first African-Canadian provincial member of Parliament, after being elected in 1963; Alvin Curling, the first cabinet minister and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; Zanana Akande, the first female African-Canadian cabinet minister; our own Mary Anne Chambers, presently the Minister of Children and Youth Services; and the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, the first African-Canadian Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.

Other community members to be noted are Dr. Alexander Augusta, Anderson Ruffin Abbott, Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, Violet Blackman, Wilson O. Brooks, Elder Washington Christian, Harry Ralph Gairey, Wilson Head, Richard Lloyd Lawrence, Kay Livingstone, James Mink, Donald Willard Moore, Eva Smith, Grace Price Trotman and Lloyd Perry.

I would like to take a moment to also recognize the local efforts of black history celebrations in Scarborough-Rouge River, my riding. In February, several different events were held in my riding to highlight African-Canadian achievements and to teach our youth about the African-Canadian experience that has

shaped the society we live in today. These events include performances by the Scarborough Caribbean and Youth Dance Ensemble and guest speakers at the Malvern Public Library; a youth essay competition on the black experience; discussion groups on black history; and Friday night dinners of traditional Jamaican, African and Caribbean foods at the Malvern Family Resource Centre. Local schools such as Malvern Junior Public School and Lester B. Pearson Collegiate Institute held black history assemblies, made daily announcements on black history facts and even raised \$1,000 to donate to a group working to fight AIDS in Africa.

Black history is a part of every Ontarian's history. I am truly happy to share these tremendous efforts in my riding during February. For all the many reasons stated this morning, let me conclude that I am pleased to table this bill and move second reading. I am sure that all members will join me in supporting Bill 183, a bill that gives official recognition in the province of Ontario to February as Black History Month on an annual basis.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I'm pleased to rise this morning and support my colleague from Scarborough-Rouge River in declaring February Black History Month. Blacks arrived as slaves to Canada as early as 1608, with more than 1,000 black slaves living in Canada by the early 1700s. Many loyalists emigrating from the United States after 1763 brought their slaves with them.

1110

In 1834, the largest early migration of people of African origin into Canada was sparked by changes in British law making all enslaved people free, and the overwhelming response which ensued was the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad, as we all know, is not a means of transportation but the name given to a freedom movement relying upon the bravery of free and enslaved Africans and the many actively opposed to slavery, the abolitionists, whether of native, European or African backgrounds.

Today much of what we know about the history of black people in Canada can be found in secondary sources and survives because of the significance the black community has placed on their history. Since its formation in 1990, Sheffield Park Black History and Cultural Museum in Collingwood has celebrated that migration and explores black settlement in the Collingwood area. Sheffield Park is a registered not-for-profit charity established, as I said, in 1990. It's located on a nine-acre site on the shores of Georgian Bay, approximately two miles west of Collingwood, and is open to the public from July 1 to Thanksgiving and to school groups year-round. It's a beautiful site in my riding.

Like many other stories of black Canadians, the stories of those who settled in Collingwood have been pieced together through oral histories passed down through generations and are contained in documents created by a variety of groups, individuals and official sources. Despite the challenges in getting there, which could often

take a year, blacks arriving in Collingwood through the Underground Railroad found support, acceptance, housing, employment and a standard of living that made it possible for the descendants of those in slavery to become citizens of a society that protected their freedoms. The community developed largely around the Heritage Church on 7th Street in Collingwood.

Although considered as free, many Collingwood blacks still had to deal with racism, far more subtle but entrenched in the culture of the day, including denial by design to certain courses of education, jobs and promotion. But despite the barriers, early Collingwood black families were a vibrant, hearty group who lead the way and became part of the local mainstream business community.

Lead by dynamo and educator Carolynn Wilson, Collingwood's Sheffield Park Black History and Cultural Museum has formally recognized and developed an awareness of the significant accomplishments of the black community in Collingwood through presentations, museum exhibits and educational programming. The key exhibit themes include the African heritage, pioneer life and times, military and the community, and Great Lakes. Many Collingwood blacks worked on the ships built out of the Collingwood shipyards, typically as cooks.

I think Black History Month was best summed up by Rosemary Sadlier of the Black History Society when she wrote, "When the contributions of people of African descent are acknowledged, when the achievements of black people are known, when black people are routinely included or affirmed through our curriculum, our books and the media, and treated with equality, then there will no longer be a need for Black History Month."

Finally, I'd congratulate Carolynn Wilson for all of her work at the Sheffield Park Black History and Cultural Museum, and I encourage all the members watching and the people at home watching to visit the museum and learn more about black history in Collingwood. Again, it's located two miles west of Collingwood on Highway 26.

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South-Weston): I'm glad to rise this morning to speak in favour of this bill that has been put forward by my colleague from the riding of Scarborough-Rouge River. I happened to reference yesterday, during my comments on the motion commemorating the 200th anniversary of the abolishment of the transatlantic slave trade, that I come from a riding where approximately one third of my constituents are of African-Canadian heritage. Certainly, upon my election in February, I had the opportunity to attend a number of events in the riding celebrating Black History Month. It's an important occasion for the community. It's also an important occasion for all Ontarians, I believe, for us to acknowledge the wonderful diversity that makes Ontario, and indeed all of Canada, a special place. Certainly, an initiative like this to formally recognize February as Black History Month would promote a greater awareness and understanding of the diversity that we all cherish and embrace.

I would, however, suggest that a symbolic bill such as this does not quite go far enough. Certainly yesterday, I had the pleasure of speaking to Rosemary Sadlier of the Ontario Black History Society, who said that while symbolic measures like this are important, more needs to be done to ensure that Canadians of African ancestry are given equal access and equal opportunity, to ensure that they are able to get ahead and advance in society.

We've been talking about some of those measures in this House, certainly over the past few days and in the fall sitting. If I may address some of those, I want to bring up the issue of a living wage, of a minimum wage. We know for a fact that of the 1.2 million Ontarians who presently toil away for an \$8 minimum wage, and in some cases less than the \$8 minimum wage—for example, in the hospitality industry—in proportion, a significant number of those 1.2 million Ontarians come from our ethno-cultural communities and from the African-Canadian community.

When we talk about real measures to enhance equal opportunity and equal access and an opportunity to get ahead, we have to look at a real living wage, and that means enhancing the minimum wage to \$10 per hour. There's also the issue of access to affordable post-secondary education. In my riding I speak with, on a regular basis, young people who come from families that work very, very hard, but post-secondary education is priced beyond their means. That's not right. Everyone, regardless of their financial circumstance, should be given the same opportunity to advance themselves through post-secondary education. So when we talk about real measures to ensure that all of us are able to get ahead, it needs to go beyond the symbolic, and the symbolic is what this particular bill is all about.

In my discussions yesterday with Dr. Sadlier, we also talked about what I think is a rather exciting initiative. There is a movement led by the Ontario Black History Society to establish an African-Canadian cultural and history centre. Obviously, that requires some investment. I would say to my colleagues from all parties in this House that that is a project we should all be supporting to help further this movement, this agenda to provide Ontarians of African heritage with the opportunity to reflect on their history, on their shared experiences, but also to give them an opportunity, a place to come together to look towards the future. I would say that that is a noble undertaking that the community has brought forward. Certainly I am prepared to support them in that effort, and I would encourage those here to follow suit.

I want to go back to my riding. I had the distinct pleasure over the course of the recent campaign, and of previous campaigns in my riding where I wasn't as successful as the last time, to receive tremendous support from members of the African-Canadian community in my riding. I do want to take this opportunity—this is my first opportunity to rise in this House to speak for a more prolonged period of time—to thank those members of my riding who supported me and were certainly instrumental in helping me achieve the success that I was able to

achieve on February 8. I wanted to ensure that that was put into the record as we discuss this particular motion.

In closing, again, I want to certainly applaud the initiative. But I want to stress upon this House that we need to go further; that we need to do more to have a truly lasting impact on the lives of those Ontarians who are of African heritage. Thank you very much for your attention.

1120

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Today, we have a most significant private member's bill by the member for Scarborough–Rouge River. I know some people may underestimate the importance of this bill, but it is critically important because just as recently as last year there was a motion put forward by a member of one of the school boards in Ontario to get rid of Black History Month. We therefore have to support this bill to reaffirm our commitment to honouring, learning, understanding and appreciating our black history. It's Canada's history; it's Ontario's history. So I commend the member for Scarborough–Rouge River for introducing this bill, because all of us around this Legislature know how difficult it is when we have basically just one private member's bill to put forward. He has chosen to use this bill for his private member's bill. I commend him for doing that, and I totally support his efforts in reaffirming that Black History Month will be recognized every year in February for years to come, and that will be his legacy.

I want to support this incredibly important initiative because this year especially it matches the remarkable point in history when we recognize the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. All over the world, jurisdictions like Ontario are going to take time to set up a permanent legacy to include the history of slavery, the perils that blacks all over this world went through for hundreds of years. That is being done for the first time in Ontario. We are following the lead of Great Britain, Scotland, Trinidad-Tobago and Jamaica in reaffirming that slavery was an atrocity beyond words. Hopefully, throughout the course of this year, as we go across Ontario to engage Ontarians, whether they be in Collingwood, in Buxton, in Amherstburg, in Owen Sound, in St. Catharines, communities across this great province will engage in a learning experience on the history and the legacy of slavery to ensure all of our citizens understand more about our history and certainly about our black history.

There are incredibly talented people who have written books that all of us should read that are adding to our wealth of knowledge. I mention Karolyn Smardz Frost, who has written a remarkably captivating book about the Blackburns. I mention the book of Dr. Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique—the burning of Montreal*. It makes us recall the fact that slavery was practised here, in Upper and Lower Canada, for over 250 years.

That is why recognitions like Black History Month are so critically important: because it is not black history, it is Canadian history. As Dr. Afua Cooper says, this is

untold history, this is silent history that has to be told, because the adage is so true that when we do not respect or know history, we are condemned to repeat the mistakes of history.

Just last night I was at Hallelujah Church on Pacific Avenue in the great city of Toronto with members of the Toronto Police Service, with Inspector Heinz Kuck, who again demonstrated the activities that Torontonians and the people of Ontario engaged in in reflecting on black history and racial discrimination.

Earlier this month, we unveiled the Buxton Bell, which is right here at Queen's Park, which connects the history of the Underground Railroad with Ontario's history. That bell, which is in my colleague Pat Hoy's riding, will be displayed here. On Sunday, it will be up at York University in a significant presentation about the bicentenary, where the Governor General of Canada, Michaëlle Jean, will come to again reflect on the history of slavery in this country.

So there is rich activity, considerable activity taking place academically, culturally and socially that drives up our consciousness. That's why this is significant. It's not just symbolic. This is a statement of legislative force that we need to reaffirm that Black History Month will be part and parcel of Ontario's history for generations to come. That is why we just can't go beyond it and say we need something better. We always need something better, but this is a significant stand that the member from Scarborough–Rouge River has taken to make this an annual recognition. I fully support his leadership on this issue and his long-standing commitment in Scarborough, when he was on council for all those years, to walking the walk, to supporting minority rights, to supporting equity in Scarborough as he has done and as he continues to do here in this Legislature. I commend him for showing that kind of leadership.

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham–Kent Essex): First of all, I want to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge River and congratulate him on this thoughtful and very important piece of legislation, this bill that he has brought forward to recognize February each and every year as Black History Month. As persons in this place would know, he could have picked any subject that he wanted to, but he has picked a most significant and important one that deals with the history of Ontario, and I commend him for that.

We must always remember and pay tribute to the contributions that African-Canadians have made to the history of our province. We can always focus on what will happen in the future as well, because with this bill we will be provided with the opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate. I think it's just an excellent initiative, and I know that the members in this Legislature will want to support it. I look forward to that.

Minister Colle mentioned the Liberty Bell. There is a replica of this historic Underground Railroad Buxton Liberty Bell on display for the first time here at Queen's Park; it's down on the first floor. I invite you all to have a look at it if you have not done so already. I thank

Minister Colle, the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, for his fine work in having this bell brought from Buxton to Queen's Park. The bell has been out of sight for 150 years. At Queen's Park, this means that for the first time members of the public will see this replica.

"During the 1800s, the Buxton settlement represented safety and freedom for thousands of American slaves escaping through the Underground Railroad." That's a quote from Mr. Colle. "For the first time, here at Queen's Park the Liberty Bell and its significance in our history will be shared with Ontarians."

The bell was a gift to the inhabitants of Raleigh Canada West—which is in my riding—from the coloured people of Pittsburgh in 1850. By 1861, an estimated 30,000 slaves had escaped to Canada through this underground railroad.

The Liberty Bell was rung every time a slave reached freedom in Buxton, which was the largest planned fugitive settlement in Canada. The Buxton Museum and the Buxton National Historical Site will be the future home of this bell.

"Black History Month is our time to remember our past and recommit to a future where all people are accepted," said Mr. Colle.

Recently, I attended Road to Freedom, a celebration of Black History Month presented by the Buxton National Historic Site and Museum. It is home to a rich collection of artefacts relating to the history of the Underground Railroad and to early African-Canadian history. As well, the Underground Railroad takes us not only through North Buxton but Amherstburg in the county of Essex and Uncle Tom's Cabin in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

The fugitives, most of them penniless, many of them illiterate, carved out new, independent lives. They built homes, schools and churches. They became teachers, business owners and writers.

It is important to recognize the achievements and contributions of the original settlers. Black Canadians play an important part in Ontario's and Canada's unique heritage. Our diversity has made us a model of co-operation and fellowship admired around the world.

I commend the member for bringing this very important piece of legislation to this Legislature.

1130

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): I want to start, as others have, by thanking the member for Scarborough-Rouge River for introducing this piece of legislation.

It's true that more is needed than recognition, but recognition in and of itself contributes to a change in our culture and our thinking and contributes to a change, ultimately, in the status of the people in this country, the people in this province, who are of African-Canadian heritage.

February is a time for remembering history that too often is simply buried or set aside.

I grew up in Ontario. I grew up with the standard history textbooks that are used in this province, and quite honestly, when I grew up, the contribution of black

Canadians, African-Canadians, was not particularly written in. It was an invisible piece, other than the Underground Railroad, which was mentioned in passing. That has been changing in Ontario, but the change has been slow.

Frankly, the member is quite correct: We are going to have to use that yearly opportunity in February to refresh people's memories; not just refresh them, but put new facts into those memories.

Yesterday we talked about the anniversary of the bill that initiated the abolition of the slave trade. Frankly, it's very important for us to recognize that the agitation in Britain that eventually led to the abolition of the slave trade rested on a number of pillars. It was not simply an act of generosity on the part of the British Parliament. It reflected, in part, agitation in Britain by former slaves who spoke energetically, strenuously, continuously, to people in Britain who had not understood all that was going on in their name. These were people who took substantial risks by speaking out, substantial risks that they would be kidnapped and sent back into slavery.

What also is generally not recognized about the abolition of the slave trade which is important to understand is that it was the acts of the Africans themselves in the plantations in what is now Haiti and in Jamaica, rising up and seizing what freedom they could—and they rose up in horrendous conditions. They lost lives. Many died terribly. It was the success in Haiti of that revolt, it was the loss in Jamaica of that revolt, that convinced the slave owners who dominated politics in the British Parliament that the jig was up, the time had come. They could no longer hold on to these possessions and expect that the world would continue as it had continued.

Britain, Europe, the white people of the Americas, grew rich from the toil of those African slaves. Sugar in the early 1800s was to the world economy in many ways what oil is today: universally needed, universally used—grown and extracted very cheaply by slave labour. People became wealthy.

Britain, which is graced with beautiful buildings, many beautiful sections of cities and the leisure at the time to develop the arts and music, benefited from the free labour that was provided by people kidnapped in chains, ripped from their families, forced to work until their death.

They rose up. They made the British Parliament give them their freedom, because if the British Parliament had not, they would simply have seized it. That is a reality about black history that has not been commonly taught in schools, not commonly thought about. That whole approach to the African continent, the African populations, African-Canadians, has got to shift in our minds and culture. We have to understand all that has been given and all that has been taken so that we actually will have a free and equal and just society.

I appreciate what has been brought forward. I appreciate the bill that has been brought forward by the member for Scarborough-Rouge River, because it is part of that ongoing cultural shift. Too often, I will read in

newspapers stories about people engaged in crime, "suspects described as black." Very rarely do I see "suspect described as white." We need a cultural shift in this province. We need a cultural shift in this country. In part, it is going on, but it needs to be continuously pushed forward, and this bill will help to do that.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Yesterday members of this Legislature rose to recognize important events in the history of people of African descent: black people. They recalled some of the atrocities committed against black people over the centuries and recognized the bicentennial of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. For the most part, we heard about depressing and distressing acts that made victims of people whose primary misfortune happened to be the colour of their skin. And yes, that was the life, those were the experiences, of my ancestors.

It is said that the members of the Ashanti tribe were dropped off in the Caribbean on islands like Jamaica, the land of my birth—dropped off first before the ships would arrive in North America because the Ashantis had a reputation for being less compliant than their traders wanted them to be. The Ashantis are known even today as a very proud people.

But, today, as I have risen to speak in support of my colleague's private member's bill, An Act to name February in each year Black History Month, I need the members of this House to understand that black history goes well beyond the atrocities that characterize the era of slavery and black history goes well beyond the more recent atrocities of apartheid and other manifestations of discrimination on the basis of race.

Indeed, my black history includes reconciliation. As Desmond Tutu, winner of a Nobel peace prize in 1984, declared, "There can be no future without forgiveness." Because truth, that is, the willingness of those who have victimized others to acknowledge their wrongdoings, and reconciliation, that is, the willingness of those who have been victimized to forgive, together make it possible for humans to move forward as more enlightened members of civil society.

My black history also includes resilience—the remarkable liberating strength of a people who were stripped of their identities but refused to forget who they were; a people who by any definition have overcome what at times have appeared to be insurmountable odds; a strong, confident and often, by necessity, defiant people; people like Rosa Parks, a woman who became the mother of the American civil rights movement when she refused to be subjected to racial segregation when she used the public transit system. She refused to allow dominant society to treat her as a lesser person because of the colour of her skin.

For me, the recognition of Black History Month is about the celebration of a people and their remarkable achievements, achievements that have changed lives and nations forever and for the better. I encourage black youth to be ambitious and to set high expectations for themselves. I tell them that with the opportunities they

now have, I should expect to see them chronicled in books like *Millennium Minds: 100 Black Canadians*, published by Grenadian-born author Patricia Holas, a graduate of the University of Ottawa. I should also be seeing them in future editions of *Who's Who in Black Canada*, a directory of black success and black excellence in Canada, by Dawn Williams, a graduate of York University, Jamaican by parentage, British by birth, who grew up in Canada. I should also be seeing them in *Who's Who in Canada*, because our black youth are also Canadians who will be contributing to Canada's history as time goes by.

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The people they can read about in *Millennium Minds* include Mathieu Da Costa, a free man of African descent who in 1608 was contracted to work as an interpreter by Pierre Dugua de Mons, who spearheaded French settlement and trade in areas of eastern Canada. Mathieu Da Costa is recognized as the first person of African origin to have made important contributions to the building of Canada. They can also learn about William Hall, who was the first Nova Scotian, the first seaman, the first black man and only the third Canadian to be awarded the Victoria Cross. The year was 1859.

James Robinson Johnston enrolled at Dalhousie University at 16 years of age and became the first African-Canadian born in Nova Scotia to graduate with a bachelor of law degree. The year was 1898. Elijah McCoy, of "the real McCoy" fame, was born in 1843 to two slaves who had escaped to Canada via the Underground Railroad. He became the inventor of automatic lubrication systems for a variety of industrial and locomotive machines.

Black history is rich with the achievements of amazing people.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): It is an honour to speak on this. It is an honour to support, as I know all New Democrats do, this private member's bill from the member for Scarborough-Rouge River.

I wanted to particularly mention a name that is near and dear to all Canadians, or should be, and certainly near and dear to New Democrats, and that's the name of Rosemary Brown, who was the first woman of colour to be elected to any electoral post. That was in BC; she was an MLA. She also ran for the leadership of the New Democratic Party. And so I would just honour Rosemary Brown on this day.

This is symbolic, but it's an important symbol. It is symbolic, but it's a symbol that we should all support.

I want to speak very briefly about something else that we should all support in this House. As I have had the privilege of touring around the greater Toronto area and around the province on Bill 150, the \$10 minimum wage, not in three years but today, I have spoken to rooms full of people of colour. The vast majority of those in the GTA and from all our ridings who have turned out to these public forums are people of colour, and they've turned out because it's their issue. They need a \$10 minimum wage, and they need it today. We know that of

the 200,000 people in Ontario who earn minimum wage, two thirds of them are women, and two thirds of those women are women of colour. This is where the community can really be helped, Mr. Speaker. This is where we can give teeth to this important symbolic gesture.

We can also give teeth to it by building housing, because again, people of colour are the ones hardest hit by the lack of affordable housing. This government has only provided 285 units between \$300 and \$500. We think that needs to change for the people in our midst.

So we ask all parties to be non-partisan about this, to address the concerns of all of those of African-Caribbean and African heritage in our midst, and to build affordable housing and also pass Bill 150, a living-wage bill, today.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in this debate today and will say on behalf of John Tory and the PC caucus that we most certainly support this bill and appreciate the member for Scarborough-Rouge River bringing this forward.

As has been said, it is, of course, symbolic, but it is important that this House take the time to consider not only black history but what the future holds for those who continue to feel the pain, in many ways, of their history. I want to say at the outset that we feel very strongly that we should in fact go beyond acknowledgment and recognition.

I was pleased to see the announcement yesterday by the Minister of Citizenship to recognize, by way of forming a committee, the work that will be done. He has commissioned to ensure that due recognition is given in various ways throughout the province, and has in fact appointed the committee, chaired by Dr. Jean Augustine, to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of slave trade. That was a very positive step. We look forward to seeing the very practical recommendations that will be made by this committee, so that throughout the province we will see in our communities various ways in which young and old can be reminded, can in fact be educated, about this important issue.

What I also want to discuss this morning is the role of the Ontario Black History Society in our province. It, as we all know, continues to promote and foster Black History Month through its programs, increased public awareness of African-Canadian history and the celebration of that rich and living legacy of African-Canadian culture that is an integral part of the Canadian multicultural mosaic.

The Ontario government has recognized Black History Month. It did so in 1993, and every Ontario Minister of Citizenship has acknowledged it ever since. It is thanks to the work of the current Ontario Black History Society president, Dr. Rosemary Sadlier, that Black History Month was recognized nationally by the House of Commons in Ottawa on December 5, 1996. This national declaration went into effect in February of the following year. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Dr. Rosemary Sadlier and the Ontario Black History Society for that achievement as well as for all of the work that Dr. Sadlier and her team do throughout the entire

year, and every year, to promote black history in this province, and indeed across Canada.

Now perhaps the member for Scarborough-Rouge River could ask his minister why it is that while, on the one hand, the one-time fund of a million dollars was allocated to the committee that I mentioned previously to mark the anniversary of the act of 1807, the Ontario Black History Society, which does such good work and promotes a large variety of educational programs and informational resources to increase public awareness about all aspects of black history, is, in a word, underutilized by the province and suffers, frankly, from a decided neglect of provincial support for its unique mission? I mention that because I believe that it may be timely for the member to challenge not only the minister, but his government caucus, to consider this as a priority as they go into a new budget year. I would strongly suggest that it may be time to move beyond symbolic gestures, as important as they are, and move beyond proclamations of this respect, especially given the fact that Black History Month has been formally celebrated across Canada for years now.

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If this bill's passage is simply to affirm what already is the rule of annual practice in this province, then what does this bill indeed add to our work or to the work of promoting Black History Month, its goals and objectives? So I submit to the member that together with this bill there really should be a commitment to provide the necessary funding for organizations such as the Ontario Black History Society. I call on the member to consider making an amendment to the bill, to make it more comprehensive and to simply do the right thing. I would ask the Ontario Ministries of Education, Citizenship and Immigration, and Tourism to partner fully with the Ontario Black History Society to promote the excellent programs of the society and to support the society in its important work in this regard. If we truly want to honour our province's history and culture, I would then ask the member, and all members of the House, to promote an African-Canadian centre for the study and preservation of Ontario's African historical and cultural legacy for future generations of Ontarians.

In response to the question, "Why have Black History Month?" Rosemary Sadlier has said:

"African-Canadian students need to feel affirmed; need to be aware of the contributions made by other blacks in Canada; need to have role models; need to understand the social forces which have shaped and influenced their community and their identities as a means of feeling connected to the educational experience in various regions in Canada. They need to feel empowered.

"The greater Canadian community needs to know a history of Canada that includes all of the founding and pioneering experiences in order to work from reality rather than perception alone.

"As a people with roots dating back to 1603, African-Canadians have defended, cleared, built and farmed this

country. Their presence is well established but not well known.

"We need a Black History Month in order to help us arrive at an understanding of ourselves as Canadians in the most accurate and complete socio-historical context that we can produce. As a nation with such diversity, all histories need to be known, all voices need to be expressed. Black history provides the binary opposite to all traditional histories. One needs traditional history to engender a common" understanding.

It's a pleasure to participate in this debate. I look forward to seeing this bill come forward and be adopted by the House and want to thank the member for bringing it forward. We look forward to seeing the desired results of this symbolic gesture today.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? Mr. Balkissoon, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Balkissoon: I want to thank my colleagues Minister Colle, Minister Chambers and MPP Pat Hoy for their statements of support. I also want to acknowledge the other speakers in the House today for their shared sentiments of support and suggestions: the member from Simcoe-Grey, the member from York South-Weston, the member from Toronto-Danforth, the member from Parkdale-High Park and the member from Oak Ridges.

Let me say that I'm pleased to see so much support in the assembly today for Bill 182, An Act to name February in each year Black History Month. The introduction of this bill is very important, and especially fitting in 2007, as this year marks the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. With the passing of this bill, all Ontarians can share in the celebrations of African-Canadian achievements in February of each year. I am pleased to introduce Bill 182, so that the Ontario Legislature will formally recognize black history as part of Ontario's history each and every year in the month of February.

Once again, let me say thank you to those who did their part this February to promote black history in their communities in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you to all members. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

CONDOMINIUM AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES CONDOMINIUMS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 71, standing in the name of Mr. Marchese.

Mr. Marchese has moved second reading of Bill 185, An Act to amend the Condominium Act, 1998. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. It's carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Marchese, the bill is referred to the standing committee of the whole House.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): No, the standing committee on general government, please, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Marchese has asked that it be referred to the standing committee on general government. Agreed? Agreed.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LE MOIS DE L'HISTOIRE DES NOIRS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 72, standing in the name of Mr. Balkissoon.

Mr. Balkissoon has moved second reading of Bill 182, An Act to name February in each year Black History Month. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough-Rouge River): I wish the bill to go to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Balkissoon has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. Agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1156 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): We have a crisis in our justice system. On numerous occasions I've raised the issue of backlogs in our courts, be they criminal, family or civil courts, and the Attorney General has no answers except to blame others.

I bring yet one more example of the Attorney General's mismanagement to his attention. I have here an e-mail from a constituent. I will read it into the record:

"I work for the Ministry of the Attorney General courts in Newmarket. They owe me over 100 hours since January 1, 2007. The Attorney General needs to address this ongoing issue and get employees paid on time and stop holding back our money, which has to be illegal. No other employer would get away with holding back pay for months while people lose their homes. I wonder how many of Michael Bryant's staff would appreciate having nearly half of their paycheque held back for months."

I don't know what's going on, but what I do know is that people who are working for this Attorney General, working as people who are doing their best, day in and day out, apparently are not even getting paid for the work they do.

I'm calling on the Attorney General, on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of these employees and their court system, to immediately investigate what is happening here and ensure that these people get paid. It's only right.

CABINET MEETING

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I rise today to celebrate a monumental event which occurred last week. In recognition of the tremendous role Hamilton has played in the history of Ontario, the McGuinty government chose to hold the first-ever cabinet meeting outside of Queen's Park in Hamilton. The cabinet listened to our concerns, made presentations and let the people of Hamilton know that they have friends at Queen's Park.

Hamilton has been working hard to revitalize and re-energize our wonderful city despite our many current challenges. So on behalf of Hamilton, I want to thank Premier McGuinty and all the members of cabinet who met with Hamiltonians. Thank you to Minister Caplan, who met with SISO. Thank you to Minister Chambers, who met with the youth at the YMCA. Thank you to Minister Gerretsen, who met with our mayor and councillors. Thank you to Minister Watson, who celebrated the Heather Crowe Award. Thank you to all the members who attended the Hamilton round table for poverty reduction, and thank you to everyone else who made this cabinet meeting so special.

Hamilton does face difficulties, but we're a strong city with a mighty past and a vision for the future. We thank the cabinet for working with us to turn those obstacles into opportunities. Yes, we have a lot of work to do, but working together we can get it done.

We do not say "thank you" enough to those who demonstrate leadership, so I want to say thank you to Premier McGuinty and to all of the cabinet for joining us in Hamilton for this monumental event.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I rise in the House on budget day to remind Ontarians of the McGuinty government's \$2.5-billion tax grab that they've been paying since the 2004 budget was passed in December of that year. This tax hike represents the largest tax increase in the history of this province.

Since this tax is being poured into the consolidated revenue fund, taxpayers aren't convinced that it's going directly and exclusively to health care.

When the tax was first introduced, the Progressive Conservative opposition asked the McGuinty government to set up a special purpose account for this tax so that where the money actually goes could be tracked. Dalton McGuinty refused to set up this account and be accountable and transparent to all Ontarians for the extra money he's taking out of their pockets.

Since this government has such a poor record of keeping its promises, why should we believe this money is going to health care? Maybe it's being used to pay the

\$5 million that McGuinty is doling out to Tom Parkinson, former head of Hydro One. Perhaps it's going towards the over \$300,000 fee being paid to former Liberal cabinet minister Jane Stewart for doing nothing in Caledonia.

Almost every day, the health minister stands in this House and literally brags about his government's \$2.5-billion tax grab, as though a tax increase is something to flaunt. If you're so proud of this tax, prove that it's going to health care. The onus is on you to do that, to provide clear and direct evidence of exactly where this money is going. Ontarians deserve nothing less, because it's their money.

SUDANESE COMMUNITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I rise in the House to share with all members the warm welcome I received from the Sudanese community in Hamilton at their International Women's Day celebration on the weekend. I had a wonderful evening and learned much about Sudan itself as a nation and the various regions and what makes them unique. I was also given the privilege of observing some of their cultural dances, hearing music that hails from their country and sampling some of their wonderful food and sweets. I was even honoured with the opportunity of partaking in their coffee, which is so important to their culture that a whole ritual is in place for brewing and serving it. How fitting that it's this week, with the United Nations Day to Eliminate Racial Discrimination, and in my first member's statement after the break I am able to relay the warm and wonderful welcome I received from the Sudanese community in Hamilton.

Thank you to the members of the Sudanese League of Hamilton who took time to explain the many things about the home they left and the one they are trying to make in Hamilton. The great honour I feel in sharing their celebration is matched by my desire to work with and for the Sudanese community on their concerns around poverty of immigrant refugee women, ESL for their children, recognition of their international credentials, obtaining the ever-elusive Canadian experience that they need to get a job, affordable child care, and a \$10 minimum wage. These issues are front and centre for all Hamilton's diverse communities.

On March 13, some 30 people met with myself and my leader, Howard Hampton. We talked about all of those same issues at the Modern Indian Buffet Restaurant on Main Street East in Hamilton. It was an excellent afternoon.

New Democrats know how Ontario can do better, and we're going to keep pushing to make sure it does.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I rise today to thank Minister Meilleur for the recent investment in my riding of Northumberland and Quinte West of more than

\$577,000. This almost \$600,000 represents the most significant investment in social service infrastructure that my riding has seen in well over a decade.

Chris Grayson, executive director of Campbellford-Brighton Community Living, and Linda Perkins, administrator of Northumberland Services for Women, joined me in celebrating the disbursement of these funds across the riding. These funds will benefit organizations supporting those living with intellectual and physical disabilities and women and children fleeing domestic violence.

I'm proud of our government's commitment to the social fabric of this province and the shift we've seen in fundamental supports for those who are underprivileged, vulnerable or ill. It's about dignity for all, not just for those who can afford it.

The money was well received. That was for those things that those folks could never do out of their regular budget, whether to fix a leaky roof or to pay somebody or look after something. As I said before, this is the first money of this kind those agencies have ever seen.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): On Tuesday, the Minister of Health, trying to defend his wait time claims, said in this House that past governments "could not even measure what the wait time was." The Premier said that past governments "wouldn't even measure wait times."

People in my riding do not need a history lesson. They care about how your government is failing today.

Let's look at what impartial commentators think about your wait time numbers. Last December, the Auditor General's report called the wait time numbers "misleading," saying that they should be taken with "a grain of salt."

Also, in December, Advertising Standards Canada, an independent agency, ruled that the Ontario Liberals' television and newspaper ads made "inaccurate claims and omitted relevant information."

Independent agencies have said that large parts of your wait times statistics are worthless. As far as I'm concerned, they are all worthless.

You need to take real action, just like our PC government did when it created the after-hours cancer treatment centre at Sunnybrook Hospital.

Stop using the wait-list crutch. Start taking real action to reduce wait times.

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ROBERT DICKSON

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I was recently saddened to receive the news of the passing of Robert Dickson in Sudbury.

Écrivain primé et professeur émérite au Département d'études françaises et de traduction à l'Université Laurentienne à Sudbury, Robert Dickson a inspiré de nombreux étudiants et artistes. Un des fondateurs de la

première maison d'édition franco-ontarienne, *Prise de parole* de Sudbury, il a grandement contribué à la vie artistique de notre province. Une de ses toutes premières collaborations fut avec le groupe CANO-musique, qui s'est inspiré de son poème « Au nord de notre vie » pour créer, avec lui, l'opus « À la recherche du nord », chanson-phare à laquelle s'identifient plusieurs Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens.

M. Dickson a aussi traduit plusieurs ouvrages littéraires du français vers l'anglais et de l'anglais vers le français, notamment certaines pièces du renommé dramaturge Jean-Marc Dalpé. M. Dickson était membre du Comité consultatif ministériel pour les arts et la culture. Mais son œuvre la plus importante est son œuvre littéraire. M. Dickson a publié six recueils de poésie, dont un, *Humains paysages en temps de paix relative*, s'est mérité le Prix littéraire du Gouverneur général en 2002.

Avec votre permission, Monsieur le Président, j'aimerais lire ce chef d'œuvre qu'est « Au nord de notre vie ».

Au nord de notre vie
ici
où la distance
use les cœurs pleins
de la tendresse minéral
de la terre de pierre de forêts et de froid
nous
têtus souterrains et solitaires
lâchons nos cris rauques et rocheux
aux quatre vents
de l'avenir possible

Je ne crois pas qu'il soit nécessaire d'offrir d'explication supplémentaire. C'est un poème qui louange le nord de notre majestueuse province et qui rend hommage aux pionniers qui l'ont développée. Il va sans dire que M. Dickson compte parmi ceux-ci.

GARY ALLEN WILSON

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): It's with a heavy heart that I stand here today to inform the House of the passing of one of my constituents and a member of the Toronto Fire Service, Mr. Gary Allen Wilson.

Gary sadly left us on March 16, 2007, succumbing to metastasized colon cancer in the liver and lymph nodes, also known as carcinoma. Survived by his wife, Daniela Nolano, daughter, Christina, and mother, Beatrice, Gary bravely served our community as a captain with the Toronto Fire Service. While visiting Daniela at the funeral home visitation on March 20, I was touched, and so were my colleagues Brad Duguid and Minister Kwinter, by the way she recounted their courageous battle during the final days of his life and all the treatments he went through. Firefighters put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe. This work is very dangerous and the repercussions can take years to manifest.

As someone who gave so selflessly to make sure that residents in my community and throughout all of Scarborough and Ontario were kept safe, I would like to take this opportunity for all of us here to remember the life of Gary Allen Wilson, someone who will be sorely missed, and to pass condolences to his family, especially his wife, Daniela.

SHANE BERNIER

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): There is a special little boy in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh named Shane Bernier. Shane, who was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia when he was nearing the age of five, will be turning eight on May 30 of this year.

Shane has one birthday request. He would like to receive as many birthday cards as possible and is hoping to break the world record. As Shane continues to undergo treatment, this birthday wish has become something he and his whole family look forward to realizing, and indeed thousands of cards have already poured in from around the world.

As the Premier has already done, I would like to encourage every member of this Legislature, their staff and everyone who hears these words to join me in sending a special birthday greeting to Shane. Cards can be sent to Post Office Box 484, Lancaster, Ontario, K0C 1N0.

Part of what makes Ontarians special is our ability to rally together to face difficult situations, whether it is as a community, as was certainly the case during the ice storm of 1998, or for individual causes, as with the thousands of Ontarians who participate in the annual Terry Fox "Run for the Cure." I invite all Ontarians to once again demonstrate that community spirit by helping to make Shane Bernier's birthday a special one for him and his family. Once again, P.O. Box 484, Lancaster, Ontario, K0C 1N0, for those who would like to send a card.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery the Honourable Chaudhry Amir Hussain, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and a parliamentary delegation. Accompanying the delegation is Mr. Tassaduq Hussain, Consul General of Pakistan in Toronto. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests.

APPOINTMENT OF CLERK OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a copy of an order in council appointing Deborah Deller as the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly commencing March 21, 2007.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Premier. It's been a week now since the news first broke that the Don Mills Surgical Unit had presented the Dalton McGuinty government with a proposal to alleviate the pain and suffering of Ontarians by performing 1,500 knee replacements. It's also been about a week since the Dalton McGuinty government rejected the proposal out of hand, even though there's potential to save the taxpayers \$1.6 million. My question for the Premier is this: Why is he condemning 1,500 people to stay on wait lists that are in some cases as long as over two years? Why won't you even entertain the notion that there is some merit to this proposal, Premier?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): First off, I think the news that is very important for all Ontarians to know is that wait times for hips and knees are down in the province of Ontario; that through the actions of this Premier leading the nation forward on wait times, we've invested considerable resource, and the public health care system is responding with tremendous new capacity and tremendous new ways of bringing their work about. They do this on behalf of patients and they do it in community after community across the province.

We will not stand by and support a private model of care which at the end of the day is more expensive—and we'll talk about that—and, most especially, which deprives our public health care system of the capacity to renew itself and find even better ways of delivering service for people. We've made good progress so far. We will continue with our nurses and our doctors to deliver even better performance for the people of Ontario.

Mr. Yakabuski: The Premier is going to have to answer the questions eventually because it's not just us asking. Today alone we've got the Sudbury Star, the Kingston Whig-Standard, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, the Globe and Mail and the National Post, and they all want to know how Dalton McGuinty can claim it's sound business principles to dismiss out of hand a plan that could save the taxpayers \$1.6 million.

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The Whig-Standard writes: "The hypocrisy is breathtaking. The Ontario government, apparently deeming its vague principles more important than alleviating pain for suffering Ontarians...."

I will point out that the Don Mills surgical unit already gets money from this government to perform other procedures, including arthroscopic knee surgeries and cataracts. Why the contradiction?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: First off, we want to say to the people from Kingston, Kitchener-Waterloo and Sudbury that our government believes that the capacity for hips and knees must be created in their communities, not that they should be subjected to a bus ride or an airplane

ride to downtown Toronto to have their knee or their hip fixed. We believe in the public health care system that's doing that work.

On the issue of cost in one of those stories, Sharon Sholzberg-Gray, president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Healthcare Association, said the following: "Some joint replacements are more routine than others." The proposal that came from the Don Mills Surgical Centre was to do the cream of the crop, the easiest procedures. When we look at the apples-and-oranges comparison that they're working on, we conclude easily that providing these services in the public domain is indeed less expensive. Fundamentally, we believe that it is our public health care system, deployed across the province of Ontario, not just in downtown Toronto, that must find even greater capacity to do an even better job for wait times on hips and knees, which are already down 30%.

Mr. Yakubski: Your responses are weak-kneed, to say the least.

Here's what they're saying in Kitchener. "We await [your] explanation of why Ontario's public health care system would suffer if this clinic received public funds to provide knee replacements. Let's hear why he rejected a plan to cut wait times and save Ontarians money. And in the absence of a solid explanation, he should review his decision. In the meantime, Smitherman should stop wrapping bad policy decisions in a Canadian flag. It makes for an exceptionally poor bandage."

Why won't you consider the proposal and get grandparents back to their grandkids' hockey games and help thousands of Ontarians get back to work and enjoying life again? Why won't you help these people instead of cutting them off at the knees?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member from bluster is here today in full force, but where was he for eight and a half years when that government was unwilling to even measure wait times, much less do anything about them? In three years, under the leadership of our Premier, the line has moved on wait times and wait times are down in Ontario.

Don Mills Surgical Centre's proposal is to pay more and get less. They want to cream off the crop and do the easiest work. We believe, fundamentally, that we must invest in the public health care system, continuing to move forward in Kitchener, in Kingston, in Sudbury, in dozens of locations across the province, unlike the Conservative Party.

It will not be the view of our party that people who need a hip or knee replacement should be shuttled on a bus to downtown Toronto. We will continue to work to invest in local communities, with our nurses and with our doctors, to make even more steady gainful improvements on behalf of the patients who were long-forgotten on your watch.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Education. Minister, I

recently met with representatives of six student councils in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. These parents expressed concern about supervision of students during lunches and recesses. They are so concerned that they wrote to you at the ministry three times, the last letter dated January 25, 2007. So far, they haven't had a response to any of their letters. So I'm asking you today: What are you going to do to ensure student safety during lunches and recesses?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I think the member opposite must mean school councils. You're talking about the parent groups? That's right.

I want to assure the member opposite that we've been in conversation with the Ontario Principals' Council and we're very aware of some of the concerns that have been raised. But the fact is that there are thousands more adults in our schools. There are more teachers in every one of our elementary schools. There are 7,800 new support workers in our schools.

One of the things we have done is we have restored the number of adults in our schools. What that means is that 80% of the schools across the province have established supervision schedules. They have schedules in place that the principals have signed off on, and I am absolutely confident that the teachers and the administrators in our schools are keeping our students safe.

Mr. Miller: Let me relate to you an incident which took place in one of the schools in my riding. A sick student was being attended to by another student. The child began to have convulsions. Mom arrived at the school within minutes of being called to find her daughter lying in her own vomit, convulsing and in the company of a 10-year-old child. No ambulance had been called and no adult was with the child. This circumstance has caused parents in my area to ask what commitment you are making to ensure that staff at all schools are certified in CPR and first aid?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I don't know the details of the individual case. What I do know is that every school and every school board in this province is required to have supervision schedules signed off by the principals in the schools so that there are qualified adults involved in the supervision of the students. Eighty per cent of the schools in this province have already got supervision schedules in place and we are working on the others. But I can tell you that there's not a principal in this province who isn't concerned about the safety of his or her students in the school. I have every confidence in the adults in our system to keep those students safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Final supplementary. The member for Oak Ridges.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): You're right, Minister: They are concerned. Here's what Blair Hiltz, the president of the Ontario Principals' Council, has to say on the issue:

"There has been a reduction in supervision at both the elementary and secondary levels, creating a supervision gap that has not been adequately filled. That gap has negatively impacted student safety and the learning environment in our schools."

On Monday at John McCrae Public School in Markham, an eight-year-old boy died after collapsing in a stairwell. An investigation into this tragedy is underway.

Minister, will you undertake to report the findings of that investigation back to this House so that we will be able to clearly determine whether that tragedy and other future tragedies like it can be avoided with proper supervision and safety standards, as the Ontario Principals' Council is calling on you to implement?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I am not prepared to take the profound tragedy of one family and make it a political ping-pong ball. That is absolutely not the way I do politics and it's not the manner we do politics on this side of the House.

I just want to read from Lou Rocha, who is the executive director of the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, who says:

"There is no doubt that the current government has brought many positive changes to education. The validation comes from those outside Ontario who see the province as a place where government, school boards and schools are aligned for the same moral purpose of improving teaching and learning. There has never been a time in Ontario's history when such a singular goal as been articulated so clearly and consistently across the sector."

I believe that the principals in the schools in our province know what we have done for education in this province. They are working with us, and I look forward to continuing to work with them.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): A question to the Premier: Premier, you often claim that education is a priority for you, yet under your general legislative grants for school boards released this past Monday, funding for school operations as a percentage of overall funding will decline to 9.36% in 2007-08 from 9.7% in 2005-06. How can you present yourself as someone concerned with the education system when you won't even ensure that there is adequate funding for school operations?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): What we did this week, on Monday, was put \$781 million of new money back in education, and we did that across the board. We put more money in for transportation. We put more money in for special education. We put more money in for school ops. We put more money in for new teachers. We created new grants to respond to the needs that boards had said to us they were facing. We put in a program enhancement grant for music and arts. We put in money for native education.

The reality is that across every part of the funding model we have made changes; we have put in more

money. School boards have more money to work with, and kids are better off in our schools.

1400

Mr. Marchese: Hundreds of striking support workers from the Durham public school board came to Queen's Park today to send you the message that your cuts to plant operations are not acceptable to them. Education assistants, custodians, secretaries and technical staff are working harder and longer today to try to maintain the school infrastructure and quality of education that you are allowing to deteriorate under your failed education funding formula. Will you stop making frozen-molasses announcements and fix the failed education funding formula so that our support workers can do their job?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Here's the reality. I think it's really important that the people of Ontario understand this. We're dealing with an education system that has lost between 50,000 and 60,000 students in the last few years. That's a huge amount of declining enrolment. In the face of that, we have put into place 7,800 new support workers.

Let's get that straight. We have been losing students from the school system because of demographic shifts in this province. In the face of that, we have put in more than 8,000 more teachers and 7,800 more support workers. What that suggests is that we recognize that school boards have to deal with the infrastructure; that we recognize the value of support workers in our system. I know the value of our secretaries, our EAs and our custodians. That's why there are 7,800 more of them in our system.

Mr. Marchese: Minister, school boards cannot take declining enrolment to the bank. And here's the reality. Over the last year, we've seen a number of school boards go to extreme lengths to balance their budgets because of your failure to fix the funding formula. School boards are raiding capital funds. They are putting off much-needed school maintenance. They are selling chocolate bars more than ever under your government and holding skip-a-thons to support their schools. Parents know the value of support workers. You say you do, but if you did, you would be giving school boards the resources they need. When will you deliver a funding formula that will bring back excellence and fairness to our children and to our school boards?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I'm just going to take this opportunity to make it clear that it is not my intention, nor is it the intention of this government, to vilify any of the education workers in our schools.

There are going to continue to be disagreements forever between governments and education, but this government's hallmark is that we believe in publicly funded education. We support the people in our schools. Of course, I'm disappointed that, right now, there is an issue in Durham. My hope is that the board and the education workers will come back to the table and resolve this issue.

What the NDP sees is a political opportunity. This is a political opportunity to them. This has nothing to do with

the students in the class. This has nothing to do with the health of the publicly funded education system.

For us, what is important is that the kids get what they need and that the respect for the workers in the system stays intact. That's what I stand for. That's what this government stands for.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): To the Premier: Earlier this week, your Minister of the Environment said something rather curious in response to my question about the high-speed Blue 22 air-rail link between Union Station and Pearson airport. She mentioned that her ministry would discuss the draft terms of reference with GO Transit and—her quote—“various proponents.”

My constituents and I know one of those proponents, SNC-Lavalin, the same outfit that peddles bullets over Baghdad, that conducts toll highway robbery here in Ontario, and has been known to support the Liberal Party.

Premier, my question: For the benefit of my constituents—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The government House leader will come to order. The Minister of Energy will come to order. The member for Timmins–James Bay will come to order. Order. Look, I'm having great difficulty hearing the member from York South–Weston place his question. Member?

Mr. Ferreira: Thank you, Speaker.

Premier, for the benefit of my constituents and those in ridings such as Davenport, Etobicoke North and Etobicoke Centre, could you shed light on who these various proponents are?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I thank the member for the question. We are, in terms of looking at the issue around the GO train initiative to the air-rail link, involving all of the proponents and all of the constituents in the process. We are currently in review. We have responded to local concerns. GO Transit has been elevated to a project of an individual EA, and all alternatives to both GO expansion and to the air-rail link will be examined and all constituents and all stakeholders will have an opportunity to participate in those open discussions. As the Minister of the Environment indicated yesterday, those terms of reference are with the minister and they are currently under review. All along, this process has been open and transparent, and it will continue to be so as we move forward with the individual EA that has been developed as a result of the concerns brought forward by a number of constituencies.

Mr. Ferreira: The minister didn't really answer my question. As we know, it's a provincial environmental assessment process, but I'll add something. The business

plan for Blue 22 as it currently stands does not add up, yet we are throwing away \$300 million of public money to finance it. My question to you, Minister, is this: Will you confirm or deny that gaming interests are among the various proponents? Confirm or deny.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Obviously, the member knows more than I do. He obviously knows about the business plan, he knows about the proponents, he's well aware, so maybe he should be answering his own question. What I am saying to you in response is that the process has been open, transparent and is up to an individual EA. All constituencies, all stakeholders, will be involved in that process. The terms of review are with the Minister of the Environment as we speak now, and when the time is appropriate that will be followed through with. Everybody will be involved in that process. It is open; it is transparent. If, in fact, the member has some information that he'd care to share with me, I'd be more than delighted to receive it.

Mr. Ferreira: First of all, it gives me delight that on my fourth day in this House a minister of the cabinet says that I may know more than she does. Thank you, Minister. Thank you very much.

Minister, just to inform you, among the initial proponents was the Woodbine Entertainment Group. My constituents want to know, will Blue 22 indeed be a Trojan horse for blackjack 21?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: I did indicate that the member may have more information than I do about this; I didn't indicate whether or not it would be valid information.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): Pretty arrogant over there.

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Absolutely.

There is a full EA underway. A full EA involves all—I don't know what part of A-L-L the member doesn't understand, but all alternatives are to be investigated. That's part of the process. That process is open; it's transparent. He has the opportunity to participate in it, just as everybody else does. So maybe I'll take back that reference. Maybe I do know more than he does.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock.

We have with us in the Speaker's gallery a parliamentary delegation from the Gauteng provincial Legislature, the Republic of South Africa, led by Mr. Bhekizwe Nkosi, chairperson of the finance committee.

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LABOUR DISPUTE

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby–Ajax): My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, only days ago my colleague the member from Oak Ridges had the privilege of inducting you into the Dalton McGuinty promise-breakers club because of your failure on your commitment to cap class sizes. Already it's time to add

two more broken promises to your resumé. During the 2003—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. I really shouldn't have to remind members that even though it is Thursday afternoon, the same rules apply as they do every other day of the week. I need to be able to, and other members need to be able to, hear members place questions and other ministers respond. So I beg your indulgence for the next 38 minutes and 11 seconds to make sure that happens.

Mrs. Elliott: During the 2003 election, Dalton McGuinty promised peace and stability in our schools. He also promised to fix the funding formula, but so much for those two promises.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member for Renfrew is not in his seat.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Minister of Health.

We all know there will be significant events at 4 o'clock, and I'm hoping that all members will be able to attend.

The member for Whitby—Ajax.

Mrs. Elliott: Because of your government's inaction and promise-breaking, we now have support staff on strike in the Durham District School Board. You were warned, two years ago, that you were laying the foundation for this when you made the deal with the teachers' union, conveniently forgetting that you have a whole class of people—the custodians, the secretaries, the educational assistants—who provide essential services in our schools. They were here in the hundreds today, and I can tell you what they told me: "There is no peace in the school board system in Ontario." Minister, what are you going to do and when to ensure that the 70,000 schoolchildren in Durham region are going to be able to safely and peacefully go to school?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): As I have been saying all day today, our first concern is for the students. We are assured that the students in the schools in Durham are in school, they are protected, the board has contingency plans in place, and I'm very confident that they are safe and secure.

But I would say to the member opposite, I don't think this is a line of questioning she wants to go down for too long. I really think that what's going to happen is, she's going to be confronting the fact that over the course of the previous government's time, 26 million learning days were lost by students in this province. There was not a day that went past that teachers, education workers, administrators didn't pick up the newspaper to see what vile thing was being said about them by members of the party opposite.

I have said today in the House that I am disappointed that we are faced with a situation where the workers and the board have not been able to come to a resolution. I look forward to that. But our record—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mrs. Elliott: Minister, you say the schools are open. They're open for the time being for some of the students, but the fact of the matter is that students with special needs simply cannot go to school right now. They need their educational assistants to be there for them for basic physical assistance in addition to learning—for toileting, for feeding, for tube feeding, in some cases. The fact of the matter is that their parents cannot send them to school right now.

In addition, it's only a matter of time before they're going to have to close the schools because the sanitary conditions are going to be so unsafe that parents won't be able to send their kids there.

And as you may have heard, there have been some incidents of violence already on the picket line. There have been fist fights; windows are broken. How much longer until the situation is going to escalate?

This is a crisis, Minister, and I ask you again: When are you going to do something about it? The residents of Durham region want to know.

Hon. Ms. Wynne: This was the norm under the previous government's tenure. The board has in place a plan for dealing with the students who have special needs. There are extra staff who have been deployed centrally to the schools to help with the students with special needs. Parents at home are being given support to keep their kids at home, but there are resources in the schools if they want to send their kids to school.

This is not an ideal situation. This is not something that is our first choice. I would really hope that the board and the union will get back to the table, that they will resolve this issue. Because as I said, we have put in place more funding for support workers since we have been in office: a 19% increase in funding for support workers; 7,800 new support workers. Our actions speak much louder than the words of the member opposite.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): To the Minister of Government Services: This morning we debated and passed Bill 185, An Act to amend the Condominium Act, 1998. The bill includes protections for condo owners, standard provisions for declarations, good-faith disclosure and mechanisms to settle disputes cheaply and effectively. Most important is the creation of a condominium review board to give condominium owners a voice.

As the number of condos continues to grow, these changes are more necessary than ever. Will you be supporting Bill 185, Mr. Phillips?

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): Certainly, the government is interested in wherever we can provide the best possible protection for condominium owners, and fair protection. I did receive the bill, I guess yesterday. I would say that there are similar protections already available in the existing bill. So as we look at it, we'll be examining it carefully and

determining whether that's an improvement over what already exists.

I would say that it's possible that the approach proposed in this bill may in fact be more expensive for condominium owners than the existing provisions. It may not be as effective a mechanism for protecting condominium owners as the one that currently exists.

We're interested in improved protection. We'll look very carefully at the bill, but we'll make sure whatever we do is in the best interest of the condominium owners.

Mr. Marchese: The member from Mississauga South more or less said the same thing you said today, so it suggests that some of you had time to reflect on the bill. Condos are becoming the option of choice for many young families, hard-working Ontarians who play by the rules. Condo owners need a one-stop shop that will give disclosure packages that are clear and straightforward, declarations with standard provisions, more effective ways to enforce the act, review officers who can resolve disputes faster and cheaper.

Mostly, these young families need a voice. They do not have a voice. They do not have anywhere in law that gives them the protections. That's why this bill was presented. I'm not quite sure where you think they're getting the help and/or the protection other than the courts, which are very, very expensive. That's why we turned to you, and we hope you will support this bill. From the sounds of it, I'm not getting very positive vibes from you, Minister.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I guess I'll say directly to the public what I said a few moments ago. I'm interested in fair and good protection for condominium owners. You introduced the bill yesterday. We debated it today, or the private members' public business debated it today. We normally have a bill far more in advance than that.

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I will look at the bill carefully to see if it does represent an improvement. If it represents an improvement, we clearly would proceed with it. But I would just say to you, and particularly the condominium owners, that I'm not necessarily convinced it does. The current procedure may be a cheaper, more effective way of doing it. It may not be, but it may very well be that the current one is better for condominium owners.

We will do what we always do: We will have the best interests of the people of Ontario at heart. If there is a better way of doing it, we will do it. But I would just say to all of us, I'm not convinced, on the basis of looking at it for one day, that it necessarily is an improvement. But that's the way we work. We will always look to improving for the people of Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, on this side of the House we know full well the importance of a well-funded public education system. As a former teacher who was subjected to the NDP's social contract and who was

continually attacked by the Conservative government, whose education minister deliberately set out to create a crisis in education, I can tell you from the parents and students and teachers that I have been speaking with in Sault Ste. Marie that our investments are making a positive difference. Under a McGuinty government, graduation rates are up, literacy and numeracy scores are up, and primary class sizes are down.

These accomplishments could not have happened without a significant change in the education funding formula. Minister, can you tell us what you've done to ensure that our changes to the funding formula will ensure that every student in Ontario reaches their maximum potential?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I'm very happy to address the issue of the changes we've made to the funding formula, because they have been fundamental and profound in the sense that they have generated more teachers, so we have more teachers in the system. We've made structural changes to respond to local needs, so the one-size-fits-all formula that was created by the previous government has been changed to reflect northern and rural boards, French-language boards, boards with declining enrolment. This year we've added the program enhancement grant that allows boards to deal with some of their local programs. We've changed the funding formula so that it meets students' needs, like those of aboriginal students. We've got a new grant this year that addresses the needs of First Nations, Metis and Inuit students. We've put more money into the system for school-based funding. We've put money into the system for Good Places to Learn to allow schools to renew their buildings, allow boards to renew their buildings. As a trustee, we spent years in the education sector putting off maintenance because there was no money coming from the provincial government to deal with those issues. That has changed. There is a \$4-billion fund that has been accessed by boards to do repairs. We're reforming the special education formula, improving transportation funding, and also have improved the community access—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Oraziotti: You know, I want to commend the minister for doing a fantastic job in education for the people of Ontario. These results are clearly in stark contrast to what we saw the Harris-Eves government inflict on our public education system. Instead of working with students and parents and our education partners, instead of putting the necessary resources in place to help our teachers do a better job, instead of ensuring there was a plan to improve school infrastructure, they sat idly with no plan for student achievement.

We have a plan. It is a comprehensive plan and it's working. The recently announced grants for student needs have been well received in my community. Minister, can you please elaborate on how our government is helping to boost student achievement for students in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: I think we should all know that the headline in the *Soo* was "Dalton and Dave Spend 24% More on Your Kids." The English school boards responsible for the *Soo* received more than \$18 million in new funding since 2003: funding for 66 new teachers; \$9 million more for 106 school repair projects as part of our Good Places to Learn initiative. The scores for tests in Sault Ste. Marie are going up. Since 2003, they've gone up 7.5%. I know the member for Sault Ste. Marie will be very happy to know that this is happening across the province. So the good news in Sault Ste. Marie is happening in every corner of the province.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Minister, you should be aware of the tremendous contribution that harness horse racing makes to rural Ontario. Members of the Ontario Harness Horse Association raced at 16 tracks last year and contributed more than \$1 billion to Ontario's rural and agricultural sectors. The tracks were dark although the slots were still open, and 80 people were laid off at Georgian Downs in my community from January to March during a labour dispute that involved the number of days live racing would occur.

Thankfully, the dispute is over but the pressure to reduce race days is raising serious concerns in rural Ontario and the horse industry. When slot agreements were signed with the OLG, the intention was to link the operation of slots with the success of on-site racing. Minister, why have you taken no measures to ensure this intent is respected?

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): The issue the member refers to is one that is determined by the Ontario Racing Commission. I think he knows that. They are an independent, arm's-length organization and they make the determination on the race dates.

In the case of Georgian Downs, I'm very happy that there was an agreement reached. There was a collective dispute going on for some time there between the harness organization and the track. I think the Ontario Racing Commission did step in to help to get that process resolved.

I would say that the Ontario Racing Commission is looking at race dates, what's in the best long-term interest of the racing industry, and they make that determination.

Finally—and perhaps this will come in the supplementary—we are looking at whether we need to take a strategic look once again at the racing industry. My suspicion is, we very much are likely to do that.

Mr. Tascona: You say that the OLG is responsible for enforcing these agreements but the OLG says that enforcement measures are up to the ORC. A downward trend in the number of live racing days would be devastating to the standardbred industry, but the accountability

measures are invisible for the agreements that called for benchmarks to measure the growth of the industry. The ORC is only legislated to deal with racing at the tracks and has no jurisdiction to deal with business arrangements, so there is no direct accountability for these agreements.

As minister, you are responsible for the OLG and the ORC. Why have you taken no action to establish a transparent and accountable relationship between slot agreements and racing dates? The racing was shut down but the slots stayed open for a 90-day strike.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: To try and clear up for the public and the Legislature, this Ontario Racing Commission—that's the ORC, the Ontario Racing Commission. I do have under me the Ontario Racing Commission. They are the arm's length, the Ontario Racing Commission, not the OLG. I do have that. They set the race dates. That is their responsibility. I'm repeating the answer I gave to your first question, just because by the supplementary I'm not sure you understood the answer.

The Ontario Racing Commission sets those dates. They have the best long-term interests of the racing industry at heart. They make that determination, and rightly so. They also were helpful in getting the two parties together that you talked about at Georgian Downs: the harness race people and the track. Finally, I would say to the member, I anticipate meeting in the next few days with the harness racing people to get their input. But I also am looking—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question. Member for Toronto-Danforth.

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto-Danforth): My question is for the Premier. Premier, your \$40-billion nuclear mega-scheme is unacceptable for a host of environmental reasons, one of which is that those plants emit cancer-causing and toxic elements like tritium into Ontario's ground and surface waters. In Ontario, nuclear power plants can release this cancer-causing agent at a level 10 times higher than in the United States and 70 times higher than in Europe. Today, on World Water Day, will you press the pause button on your \$40-billion nuclear mega-scheme?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy): Our government remains committed to ensuring that Ontarians have an adequate supply of reliable and clean electricity. That's why we have taken this province from last to first in renewable energy. That is why we have become the leading jurisdiction in North America on conservation initiatives, unlike the member opposite's party who cancelled all conservation initiatives.

1430

We have laid out an integrated power system plan that calls for new sources of power from a variety of sources of supply that is now before the Ontario Energy Board. It will be subject to environmental assessment by the federal regulator. It will be subject to licensing agreement

by the federal regulator. Unlike the member opposite who has laid out no plan, no concept of what to do, whose ideas will probably triple or quadruple the price of electricity in Ontario, we have laid out a plan with details about where our new supply will come from, with full assessment and public scrutiny, in a transparent, open and accountable way—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Tabuns: It's very interesting to me that when you start asking questions about water protection, the Minister of Energy always trumps the environment. In September 2006, Dr. David McKeown, medical officer of health for the city of Toronto, specially asked the McGuinty government to adopt standards for tritium that are more protective of human health. Your Minister of the Environment has not yet acted on that request, has not yet changed that standard. Adopting those standards could pose real problems for nuclear power in this province.

Premier, the question to you is, what are you going to choose? Are you going to protect the nuclear industry or are you going to protect water quality and public health in this province? You've got to rethink your nuclear mega-scheme.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: No Premier and no government in the history of Ontario have done more to protect our water supply than the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government in Ontario.

I'm reminded by my colleagues behind me that you voted against those water protection initiatives. Let's talk about the source water protection act. They voted against that. We don't need a lecture from you, sir, with respect. This government has done more to clean up Ontario's water, provide safe, clean water for all Ontarians and, by the way, provide clean, green, renewable electricity in a safe, reliable fashion that all Ontarians are proud of. Put your money where your mouth is and offer up a real plan, not a bunch of ideas that are undefended. Do what this government does; protect water and provide reliable, clean, green, electricity.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is to the Minister of Health. As the minister knows, there's been a lot of talk here in the House and even in my own local paper about our government's decision to focus on the public delivery of health care. Of particular issue is whether or not it is in fact cheaper to perform knee surgeries at the Don Mills Surgical Centre or at a public hospital. I want to ask the minister a very direct question. Why has he decided not to accept the proposal from the Don Mills Surgical Centre?

Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The analysis of the cost saving in the Don Mills Surgical Centre that we've seen so far is superficial. We have been taking a good look at it.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): You don't understand the meaning of that word.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You're a problem today. I'm a problem every day; you're a problem today.

In Ontario, our public hospitals do both partial and total knee replacements, and they do those for a blended price of \$6,882 each. Don Mills Surgical Centre's proposal is only to do with the partials, so they've creamed off the easiest cases, which are considered at least 30% easier than the full ones. The net effect of this is they offer us \$5,800. If they were being fair about it, the price would have been \$4,817. The bottom line is that to do these cases in the private sector would indeed cost us almost \$1.5 million more than the public health care system is able to do them for today. And by the way, wait times for knee surgery in the province of Ontario are down by more than 30%.

Mr. Milloy: I want to thank the minister for his clarification.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order.

Mr. Milloy: I think it's important that members realize there's no evidence to support the claim that the Don Mills Surgical Centre proposal will save taxpayers money. Yesterday the minister spoke quite extensively about innovation in the public sector. I know in my community at Grand River Hospital, people are waiting less time for knee replacements, while they're waiting less time for cataract surgeries at St. Mary's General Hospital.

I want to ask the minister today, if we followed the Leader of the Opposition's policy of more private delivery of health care, would we be having the type of success that we're seeing today?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I believe that it's important to drive innovation in the context of the public health care system. We see no evidence that private delivery is a cheaper answer. There's no evidence of that anywhere in the world. We're expanding capacity and driving down prices in the public sector. Here's an example. Today, the Don Mills Surgical—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You're going to like this one; you're going to like it.

The Don Mills Surgical Centre—

Interjection.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: You won't like anything—charges us \$750 per eye. Today in the city of Toronto, in the public sector, we've driven prices down to the point that we can get these done for \$575 an eye. So I'm here today to tell all members of the House that innovation in the context of the public health care system will allow us to reallocate these volumes from the Don Mills Surgical Centre next year to have these additional cataract volumes provided less expensively in the high-quality environment in the public health care system, evidence of lower prices, higher volumes and that wait times for cataracts are down by 41.2%.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I have a question for the Minister of Education. Minister, a couple weeks ago our education critic, the member for Oak Ridges, and I had the opportunity to tour North Grenville District High School in the town of Kemptville. That school was built in 1936 and it's had a number of additions over the years. It's faced with multiple levels, no full accessibility for the handicapped, no front entrance or foyer, no proper cafeteria, poor air quality, quantities of asbestos—a significant range of challenges in that particular school. Minister, I'm just wondering if you are aware of it. The municipality and the school board have contacted your predecessors and have received no responses. Can you give any indication to the community today just what the possibility of replacement for that aged facility might be?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): A letter has gone to the board on this issue. The member opposite has been copied on the letter. My understanding is that this school has been put on the list of the "prohibitive to repair" candidates. Right now we're in the process of consolidating the list of "prohibitive to repair" schools that boards are proposing. My understanding is that the board has put this school on the list and they've done everything they can to get the attention that the school needs.

Mr. Runciman: I'm not sure; perhaps the minister, in her response to the supplementary, can expand on what "prohibitive to repair" means in real terms. I guess the concern was that there was a letter sent from the fire chief in Kemptville to your predecessor in 2006, and in part it stated, "The original part of the school has had several additions over the years, creating nothing short of a complicated 'maze.' If a fire were to start in one of the lower areas of the school, it would be very difficult not to have occupants of the building be in great jeopardy due to the smoke travel." So I think we're all heartened by your response, but obviously we'd like to have elaboration in terms of, what does this really mean to the community? When can we expect to see a decision on this?

Hon. Ms. Wynne: Just on the first part of the question, "prohibitive to repair" is defined as those costs of bringing a school up to ministry renewal standards that would be greater than 65% of the replacement costs. So in other words, it would cost more to replace or as much as to replace as to renew. What we're asking boards to do is to identify the schools that they believe are in that category.

I can't say exactly when the final decisions will be made, and I can't guarantee which schools in which boards are going to be dealt with. But the board, as I said in my letter that you've received a copy of, has done exactly what it should do in terms of bringing to the notice of the ministry the concerns around this school. As the ministry consolidates its list, the board will be informed of the funding that it will get.

1440

PAPER MILL

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, you will know that Abitibi-Price in Iroquois Falls has applied to your ministry in order to transfer the water lease agreements from the corporate entity of Abitibi to a new corporate entity at some future date. Can you confirm to this House today if in fact your ministry has transferred the water right agreements to that new entity?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I very much appreciate getting the question today so that we can maybe clear up what might have been a misunderstanding between evidence that was given to the OMB hearing and a letter from our legal department to Roger Hardy, the president of the union at Abitibi.

This summer, when Abitibi indicated that they were going to form an affiliate company for the power part of their operation, which they're allowed to do under the water lease, the water lease was transferred into the new name. Subsequent to that, they announced a partnership with Caisse de dépôt, etc. Nothing has happened since then, but the name change was done in August.

Mr. Bisson: You're confirming in the House today that your ministry has effectively transferred the water lease agreement from Abitibi to the new company, if I understand what you have just said. This is contrary to the wishes of the community, the union and the municipal council because they know far too well that, once dams are transferred away from Abitibi, there will be far more money to be made making electricity than there will be at times to produce paper. My question to you is a simple one from the people of Iroquois Falls and the people of your constituency: Why did you sell them down the road?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: As the member knows and as all the union executive knows, whom I met with, and the town council, about eight weeks ago, in the 2003 water lease agreement that was signed by the previous government there was provision for the potential of an affiliate company, if they wished to do so, of no more than 25% new ownership in that company. Abitibi Consolidated decided to exercise that option, and they had the legal right to do so without seeking any permission. That was according to the water lease agreement that was signed in 2003 before this government came to power.

TRAFFIC CONTROL

Mr. Mario Sergio (York West): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. In my area of York West, York University is a city within a city. Over 51,000 students and over 9,000 faculty and staff frequent the campuses daily, using 1,660 buses and 32,000 vehicles to help them in their commute. This volume of traffic seems to worsen the congestion that commuters have to face

daily and also presents a challenge to our environment. Minister, what has this government done to address these challenges for the folks of my riding?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Transportation): I'd like to thank the member for the question.

On March 6, I'm very pleased to say that the federal government came to the table with their portion of the share for the Toronto subway into York; \$670 million, as you know, came out of our budget last year and has been waiting for that federal contribution for some time. However, we are pleased that it is here.

It is the first time that there will be regional transportation that will go from the 416 into the 905 area—the first time ever. The 65,000 students who are participants at York University will have an alternative mode of transportation to reduce bus congestion and reduce the cars that go into that campus. But even more so, it helps to spur economic development into the next region as well.

We're very pleased that our federal partners have come to the table, and we look forward to the Toronto-York subway having the shovel in the ground in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Sergio: I know that folks in my riding and across the GTA are thrilled to see a government that is taking action and making investments in public transit. Minister, although the York-Spadina subway extension is vital to those commuters making their way to university and work in the area, this is not the only challenge. We all know that congestion continues to be a challenge throughout the GTA. Can you tell the members of this House how the McGuinty government is working toward meeting the wider challenge?

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: The best answer is a comparison. The previous government put in \$52 million all the time they were in government. This year alone, we've put \$260 million in public transit—\$260 million just for this year alone. What we've been able to do is deliver on those commitments: two cents of the gas tax money to municipal transit; \$1.6 billion in the gas fund to the municipalities by 2010.

We've created the Greater Toronto Transit Authority, we've promoted car pooling with \$127 million in the HOV lanes alone, and we're looking to expand that within the 403, the 400, the 404. The best part is that we're working together with those municipal partners to make a difference in how public transit can improve the congestion around this province, not only in this large city but in other large cities. It's another example of how the McGuinty government actually works with people to get things done.

MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, since taking the reins of the ministry, the MNR now shares a unique similarity with high school bands, scouting and Girl Guide troops and a host of other groups:

You're all relying on bottle drives and bake sales to raise money. Minister, aren't you the least little bit embarrassed that staff have to resort to these kinds of measures to do their jobs?

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): It's ironic you ask that on this day because, as you know, the McGuinty government launches its new budget for fiscal 2007-08 this afternoon. As I had mentioned to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters when I got a similar question from the floor, I have been working with the government and the finance minister about the various challenges that MNR has. As I said to them there, I'll say to you now: I'm confident that this government understands the challenges that the Ministry of Natural Resources has and I'm confident that we're going to have the capacity to do the job as we have had the capacity to do the job. I want to assure the member that we are fulfilling all of our responsibilities.

Mr. Miller: Minister, Dalton McGuinty made a promise to properly fund the Ministry of Natural Resources in 2003. It's now 2007, so it's about darn time he kept that promise, in your last year of government.

Minister, I'd like to refer you to an article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, January 31, 2007: "What on earth is going on with the Ministry of Natural Resources?" Kelly Egan writes about conservation officers "stuck in their offices for weeks" because there isn't any money to gas up the trucks. Officers are restricted as to how much and what kind of patrolling they can do. In one region, COs had sufficient funds to patrol about 1,200 kilometres a month. In November, you brought the hammer down and notified officers that they were limited to joint patrols, court commitments and follow-up investigations.

Let's be clear. It's not because these people don't want to do their jobs. They love their work, they take it seriously, but they're afraid to speak out for fear of reprisals. Robert Pye, the communications coordinator of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, states: "This is not just a hunting and fishing issue. It's an issue for anyone who cares about our natural resources."

Minister, I'm here to ask you, on behalf of conservation officers: When are you going to take your mandate seriously and fund conservation officers fully and properly?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: As I've said to the member of the House, this past year we have spent about the same amount of money as we did the year before in enforcement. In fact, not only have we spent the same amount of money, we do it in a smarter way now. We have much more reliance on intelligence work because we have a beefed-up intelligence unit and so we're more strategic in our enforcement approach, so we get better compliance.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): The Conservatives cut it by 46%, I remember.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I very much appreciate the member for St. Catharines coaching me on these responses because he's supportive of the Ministry of

Natural Resources and our enforcement and compliance unit. I would assure the member that we're doing the job out there to make sure that our natural resources are protected.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): I guess it's my lucky day. I get a second go-round with the Premier.

Ontarians were recently horrified to learn that their pets are threatened by tainted food. They would be even more horrified to know that Ontario is now the only province in Canada where lost family pets that end up in pounds can be sold off within 72 hours to research laboratories. Premier, will you, as the Animal Alliance of Canada has asked, remove all references to dogs and cats from the Animals for Research Act?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Community Safety.

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for the question. I am sure the member should know that the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, which comes under my ministry, deals with the enforcement of the animal rights movement. That is under the direct responsibility of the independent societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. We do not control them. They are stand-alone organizations. They do what they do in conjunction with humane societies, and we provide them with funding so they can do the enforcement. Any questions that you have about how they do that should be directed to them.

1450

Mr. Ferreira: That's not the act that I was asking about. I'm going to repeat it for you: the Animals for Research Act is the act I'm asking about. It permits municipal pounds to sell dogs for \$6 each and cats for \$2 each to medical laboratories if they are not claimed within 72 hours. Ontario is the only province that has this on the books. Will you work with me to change the law?

Hon. Mr. Kwinter: As I pointed out earlier, my responsibilities are for the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. That is covered in the legislation. We provide funding—\$119,000 a year for enforcement, enforcement officers—and that is where my responsibility is. The other issues are issues that I'd be happy to look into for you, but I can just tell you that that is not covered in our particular act.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week. I know there was a change in something and it's right here, so I've got it.

Monday afternoon, budget debate, the official opposition response; and in the evening, second reading of Bill 171, Health System Improvements Act.

Tuesday afternoon, budget debate, the third party response; and in the evening, concurrences and the Supply Act.

Wednesday afternoon, second reading of Bill 184, Endangered Species Act; and in the evening, second reading of Bill 165, Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act.

Thursday afternoon, third reading of Bill 140, Long-Term Care Homes Act.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I've also signed this.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Petitions?

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South–Weston): My friend from Owen Sound has stolen some of my thunder, since my petition deals with the same issue. So I'll take a bit of time to acknowledge a constituent who is here. Ms. Sylvia Hollingsworth has been a lifelong tenant activist

and has contributed greatly to improving the quality of life in York South–Weston. Thank you, Sylvina.

From 164 of my constituents at Leisureworld on Lawrence Avenue, I will read the following:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year”—hopefully in the budget to come—“to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

I proudly affix my signature to the petition.

SHEHRAZAD NON-PROFIT HOUSING INC.

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing terminated all government subsidies to Shehrazad Non-Profit Housing Inc. in the fall of 2003; and

“Whereas the termination of subsidies caused great financial hardship to the corporation and substantially reduced its ability to fund capital repairs and ongoing expenses; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario should restore full funding and all subsidies to Shehrazad Non-Profit Housing Inc. and reaffirm its commitment to non-profit housing in relation to 45 Howe Drive and 31 Oprington Drive, Kitchener;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately restore all subsidies to Shehrazad Non-Profit Housing Inc. and to reaffirm its commitment to non-profit housing at 45 Howe Drive and 31 Oprington Drive, Kitchener.”

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a number of petitions to do with Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare lab services. They read:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare ... wish to maintain current community lab services; and

“Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

“Whereas the funding of community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare; and

“Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare needs to reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community lab services.”

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): I have a petition that came to me from the people of Cumberland, Navan and Orléans. Due to the fact that my petition is identical to the one read by the members from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and York South–Weston, I’d just like to table this petition with the Clerk of this assembly.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have here a petition that also deals with the issue of long-term care. It’s signed by a lot of people in my constituency, so it’s obviously a major issue in the province of Ontario. I do want to read it into the record.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

I’ve received this from a number of nursing homes in my riding.

ADULT LITERACY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas investing in adult literacy initiatives will give more Ontarians the opportunity to upgrade their skills and gain the training they need to reach their full potential; and

“Whereas, through these funding initiatives, Ontarians will have greater accessibility to post-secondary education and valuable apprenticeship programs that will put them on the right track to gaining the jobs in their field of choice; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government is providing new support for adult literacy by expanding academic upgrading services to help workers build strong literacy and numeracy skills so they are able to perform at a higher level, thereby enhancing our workforce and our economy;”—

Interjection.

Mr. Ruprecht: I'm happy that you agree with that as well.

"Whereas the McGuinty government is investing \$6.2 billion more into post-secondary education and training by 2009-10;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the McGuinty government's efforts in providing funding to adult literacy initiatives in order to both help Ontarians to meet their full potential as well as to strengthen Ontario's economy."

I'm delighted to sign this petition; I certainly agree with it.

1500

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I have a petition provided by Riverbend Place and St. Andrew's Terrace in Cambridge. It is the same as members ahead of me have read, and I'll just read the prayer for relief rather than the preamble.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

As I agree with this petition, I affix my name thereto.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Petitions? The member for Davenport.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I appreciate that you recognized me again, Mr. Speaker. That's very good of you today. This petition is to the Parliament of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the people of Ontario demand a quality public education system that will give our children the tools to compete with the world; and

"Whereas Premier McGuinty and the Liberal caucus are fighting for our future by implementing a positive plan to improve our public schools, including smaller class sizes;

"Whereas the Conservative Party and John Tory want to take millions from public education to literally pay people to withdraw their children from the public system and send them to elite private schools;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Premier McGuinty in his commitment to giving our children a ladder to success through excellent public education and not spend taxpayer dollars to benefit the few who can afford private school tuitions."

Since I agree, I am more than delighted to sign my name to this petition.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'd like to take this occasion to extend my congratulations to Ms. Deller, our new Clerk of the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and also present a petition on behalf of the riding of Durham which reads as follows:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I'm pleased to present and sign this in support of my constituents.

STEVENSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital needs \$1.4 million in new funding over the next three years to get its birthing unit reopened and to ensure that they can recruit enough obstetricians and health care providers to supply a stable and ongoing service for expectant mothers in our area; and

"Whereas forcing expectant mothers to drive to Newmarket, Barrie or Orangeville to give birth is not only unacceptable, it is a potential safety hazard; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital cannot reopen the unit under its current budget and the McGuinty government has been unresponsive to repeated requests for new funding;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately provide the required \$1.4 million in new funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that the local birthing unit can reopen and so that mothers can give birth in Alliston."

I agree with that petition and I've signed it.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Petitions? The member for Davenport.

GO TRANSIT TUNNEL

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your recognizing me today on this very auspicious day. I have a petition which is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario, the minister of infrastructure services and the Minister of Transportation. It reads as follows:

"Whereas GO Transit is presently planning to tunnel an area just south of St. Clair Avenue West and west of Old Weston Road, making it easier for GO trains to pass a major rail crossing;

"Whereas TTC is presently planning a TTC right-of-way along all of St. Clair Avenue West, including the bottleneck caused by the dilapidated St. Clair Avenue-Old Weston Road bridge;

"Whereas this bridge (underpass) will be: (1) too narrow for the planned TTC right-of-way, since it will leave only one lane for traffic; (2) it is not safe for pedestrians (it's about 50 metres long). It's dark and slopes on both east and west sides, creating high banks for 300 metres; and (3) it creates a divide, a no man's land, between Old Weston Road and Keele Street. (This was acceptable when the area consisted entirely of slaughterhouses, but now the area has 900 new homes);

"Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that GO Transit extend the tunnel beyond St. Clair Avenue West so that trains will pass under St. Clair Avenue West, thus eliminating this eyesore of a bridge with its high banks and blank walls. Instead it will create a dynamic, revitalized community enhanced by a beautiful continuous cityscape with easy traffic flow."

Again, I certainly agree with this petition, and I'm delighted to sign my name to it.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby-Ajax): I have a petition arising out of a community meeting organized for this purpose by Mr. Paul Taylor.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I certainly agree with this petition, and I'll affix my signature to it.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have hundreds of petitions to support community lab services at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, and the petitions read:

"Whereas the Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) has indicated its support for moving significant parts of its laboratory operations to the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie; and

"Whereas Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare has indicated that it intends to cease doing community-based lab work if it does not receive \$150,000 more in funding from the province of Ontario; and

"Whereas the impact of such decisions would negatively affect timely health care delivery to residents of Muskoka, while increasing the overall cost to taxpayers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to work with Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain hospital and community-based lab services at the existing facilities in Bracebridge and Huntsville, including restoration of lab services that have recently been contracted out to hospitals in Sudbury and Barrie."

I affix my signature and support this petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): This completes the time allotted for petitions.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Government Services concerning slot machines and horse racing. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to suspend proceedings until 4 p.m.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent to suspend proceedings until 4 p.m. Agreed? Agreed.

The House suspended proceedings from 1508 to 1603.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2007 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2007

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I move, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Sorbara has moved, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

I would ask the indulgence of the House as the pages deliver the budget.

Have all members received a copy of the budget?
Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I am pleased to present Ontario's 2007 budget.

It's a budget that we can all celebrate.

It ushers in an era of new economic strength in Ontario, an era as welcome as spring itself.

It's rooted in the values that we share.

It's based on the hard work and the commitment of nearly 13 million people, and it is driven by our government's determination to build a stronger Ontario.

We began three and a half years ago with a challenging mandate:

- Strengthen health care and education;
- Grow a more vibrant economy; and
- Bring our finances back to health.

We've made real progress.

Our schools are better places to learn.

Our colleges and universities are expanding.

Our health care system is both healthier and more responsive.

We're building new infrastructure across the province.

Our economy is growing again.

And today, we leave behind the deficits that we inherited.

Today, we begin an era of balanced budgets and sustainable surpluses.

Surpluses that strengthen our very economic fabric.

Aujourd'hui, nous amorçons une ère de budgets équilibrés et d'excédents soutenus.

Ces excédents renforceront vraiment notre tissu économique.

Ontario's new economic strength is an opportunity for us to become an even stronger province.

That journey begins today with this budget.

We expand opportunity for Ontario's most vulnerable people.

We direct new resources to enhance public services.

We strengthen our economic capacity, community by community, right across the province.

And we launch initiatives for a greener Ontario.

Nous accroissons les possibilités pour les citoyennes et citoyens les plus vulnérables de l'Ontario.

Nous allouons de nouvelles ressources pour améliorer les services publics, et en même temps, nous renforçons notre capacité économique.

The clearest evidence of our new economic strength is the province's return to financial health.

In October 2003, we inherited a deficit of \$5.5 billion.

Today, we table a balanced budget.

Aujourd'hui, il s'agit d'un budget équilibré.

We've made progress in each year.

For the year that's just ending, we now anticipate a surplus of \$310 million.

For 2007-08, we project a surplus if, as we expect, the reserve will not be required.

In 2008-09 and 2009-10, we are planning for surpluses even after providing for a healthy reserve.

Indeed, our government is on track to post five consecutive surpluses.

Cinq excédents consécutifs.

Our debt-to-GDP ratio will be at its lowest level in 13 years.

Economists understand what a positive indicator that is.

But every one of us knows how important it is to be prudent managers of the public's money.

We promised, for example, to find \$750 million in savings by 2007-08. We actually saved more than \$800 million.

Ontario is now the second-lowest among provinces in per capita spending on administration.

And Ontario is now the national leader when it comes to coordinating more efficient expenditures by our partners in the broader public sector.

At the same time as we have been prudent managers of our finances, we have been persistent in our fight for fairness from the federal government.

1610

It was the Premier who took on this issue, and it was the Premier who negotiated the greatest improvement to fiscal fairness since the era of Lester Pearson and John Robarts.

In recent weeks, we have reached agreement on federal funding for the environment and for public transit.

That agreement is evidence enough that when governments work together, we can make real progress.

Sir, another sign of Ontario's new economic strength is the steady growth of our economy in the face of fierce competition.

With the exception of the fall of 2006—when North America experienced a cooler economic climate—Ontario's economy has been growing at a healthy rate.

And so has job creation.

Since 2003, the Ontario economy has added some 327,000 net new jobs.

Over the next three years, we expect to see another 270,000 new jobs created.

Employment growth and higher wages have increased the personal incomes of Ontarians by more than 14% over the past three years.

More jobs, and better jobs, mean that people have more money in their pockets.

At the same time, businesses have shown their faith in the economy by investing almost \$147 billion in business expansion.

Private sector forecasters expect Ontario's economic growth to strengthen from 2007 to 2009.

The Ministry of Finance forecasts growth of 1.6% in 2007, 2.8% in 2008 and 3.1% in 2009.

Our responsibility is to ensure that this new economic strength provides for the lives of our people and improves their lives.

We continue that mission today with new resources for Ontario's children.

Nous poursuivons cette mission avec de nouvelles ressources pour les enfants de l'Ontario.

The Premier has said that helping children in poverty must be a top priority for us.

In his words, it is both a social and an economic imperative.

So today we are introducing the Ontario child benefit for children in low-income families.

Nous proposons aujourd'hui d'instaurer la Prestation ontarienne pour enfants, destinée aux enfants de familles à faible revenu.

The Ontario child benefit would expand opportunity for 600,000 families—and nearly 1.3 million children.

It would provide for children in every low-income family, whether their parents are working or not.

Over five years we plan to invest an additional \$2.1 billion in our province's children.

It would mean that parents would be able to move off welfare without worrying about losing benefits for their kids.

The OCB will begin this July, with a down payment of up to \$250 per child.

By 2011, low-income families would receive up to \$1,100 per child every year.

I want to tell you that these reforms go well beyond ending the clawback of the national child benefit supplement.

Indeed, we are investing. We plan to invest four times as much money to help over twice as many children.

The new Ontario child benefit has a broad base of support across the province. Indeed, it has been endorsed publicly by three former Premiers: William Davis, David Peterson and Robert Rae.

While many, many people have worked to make the OCB a reality, I would like to single out and thank two MPPs for their passionate advocacy for children and low-income families: the member for London North Centre, Deborah Matthews, and the Minister of Education and member for Don Valley West, Kathleen Wynne.

In concert with our transformation of our support system, once again we will increase by 2% the benefits we provide to those receiving Ontario disability support and Ontario Works payments.

We are also going to provide new funding for children's treatment centres and for children's mental health.

We are allocating an additional \$25 million this year in new funding to support better child care. A year later, in 2008-09, that funding will double to \$50 million.

Finally, I am delighted to announce our intention to establish a College of Early Childhood Educators. It would ensure high standards of quality throughout our child care system.

When we created the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, we did so to improve the health and well-being of children.

The steps we are taking today in this budget go a long way to meeting that purpose.

At the same time, there are other challenges to be met.

Ontario's new economic strength must provide fairly for Ontario's lowest-paid workers. The minimum wage in Ontario had been frozen for nine years when we were elected in October 2003.

Le salaire minimum en Ontario avait été gelé pendant neuf ans.

We raised it to \$8 an hour in four annual steps.

Today, I am announcing our plan to raise the minimum wage to \$10.25 per hour. We will do so—

Applause.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: We will do that with increases of 75 cents per hour on March 31 in each of the next three years.

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Nothing is more important to working families than access to affordable housing.

In the words of one housing advocate, "It all begins with an address."

In this budget, we are providing an additional \$392 million to better house Ontario families.

—Over 27,000 low-income working families will receive \$100 a month in housing supplements. That will bring the total number of families we help to 35,000.

—We are also providing \$127 million to Ontario municipalities to build new affordable homes and rehabilitate existing ones.

—And this budget also provides funds to build over 1,000 off-reserve homes for aboriginal families.

Workers injured on the job deserve our support.

Many of them have benefits that have not kept pace.

We propose to improve WSIB benefits for about 155,000 injured workers.

The increase would be 2.5% each year for the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, access to justice is the hallmark of a strong liberal democracy.

During my own 19 pre-budget consultations, I heard repeatedly about the constrained state of our legal aid system.

Today we are providing an additional \$51 million over three years to expand access to legal aid.

We're also adding 30 new justices of the peace to ensure that the work of our courts is more timely.

We will be supporting the new Human Rights Legal Support Centre with an additional \$8 million over three years.

Finally, we are providing some \$49 million over three years for victims of crime through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board even as we review how we improve that system.

During our consultations, we heard a clear message from seniors: "Help us stay in our homes and give us greater access to our money."

This budget responds in several ways.

For the fourth year in a row, we plan to enhance the Ontario property and sales tax credit for low-income seniors.

And I believe that seniors will welcome our reforms to Ontario's property assessment system.

We are also proposing a new life income fund that would increase access of pensioners to their money.

And we plan to allow seniors to reduce their income tax through the new income-splitting rules proposed by the federal government. This will result in an Ontario tax savings of \$170 million in this year alone.

A good indicator of how well we care for one another in a civil society is the support we provide for developmental services.

Pre-budget consultations confirmed for me that this sector needed additional support.

So in this budget, we propose to invest an additional \$200 million over the next four years to strengthen developmental services.

Nous proposons d'affecter 200 \$ millions de dollars à l'expansion des services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle.

We will also provide \$7 million in urgently needed capital funding.

Our plan three and a half years ago was to provide better schools and better health care.

That work continues today.

Notre plan il y a trois ans et demi visait l'amélioration des écoles et des soins de santé.

Nos efforts en ce sens se poursuivent aujourd'hui.

We are increasing health spending to \$37.9 billion, and that represents a 29% increase since 2003-04.

With additional funds, we can include pediatric surgeries in our wait time strategy, because our children will get the surgeries that they need when they need them.

More funding means Ontario is getting 8,000 nurses.

It means that new hospitals will be opening in Brampton, in Penetanguishene, in Smiths Falls and in North Bay, to name a few.

Additional funding will mean more family doctors.

It means 400,000 kids will receive free immunizations.

By any measure, our health care system is growing stronger. Our job is to make sure that trend continues.

The Quest for Gold lottery provides Ontario's amateur athletes with direct financial support.

Today I am announcing that this funding will continue with a dedicated \$10-million fund.

Now our athletes and their families can concentrate more on athletic success and less on worrying about paying the bills.

We're joined in the House today by Jamie Sinclair and Neil Sinclair. They've just returned from the Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse where, earlier this month, Team Ontario recaptured the Canada Games flag for the first time in eight years. Would you please welcome them to the House.

Applause.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: We are also increasing support for education in the coming year.

This budget allocates an additional \$781 million in grants for student needs. That's up 17% since 2003-04.

The average per-student funding in 2008-09 will be almost \$9,700.

That represents an increase of 22% since we took office.

It also means that almost all of our children in the primary grades are in smaller classes.

It means better test scores, and it means higher graduation rates.

It means better public education in the province of Ontario.

Two years ago, the centrepiece of our budget was Reaching Higher, a dramatic plan to improve post-secondary education in Ontario.

It has been a huge success.

In the coming year, operating grants to colleges and universities will rise to \$4 billion. That is an increase of almost 40% since 2003-04.

We will provide an additional \$390 million for post-secondary institutions to help with more classrooms, higher enrolments and more training.

1630

Our investment means that by next year, a record half a million students will be enrolled in colleges, universities and apprenticeship programs.

At the same time as we're making these investments, we're managing government more efficiently.

We are helping hospitals, universities, colleges and other institutions save money by streamlining purchases.

We've hired more people in areas that are crucial to everyone's well-being: more water, food and meat inspectors; more health care workers; more teachers; more security, probation and parole officers.

And we have even introduced a money-back guarantee for quick delivery of birth, marriage and death certificates.

These new investments will make a real difference in the everyday lives of families, students, seniors and children in every corner of the province.

They strengthen the very fabric of our society.

Ontario's new economic strength allows us to expand economic opportunity.

We are making improvements in almost every area of public policy.

We are reforming and reducing business education taxes. We propose a fairer property tax assessment system. We strengthen various sectors of our economy and we are investing more in innovation.

Nous réformons et réduisons l'impôt scolaire applicable aux entreprises. Nous proposons un système d'évaluation foncière plus équitable. Nous renforçons différents secteurs de notre économie et nous investissons davantage dans l'innovation.

Taxpayers and municipalities have told us that they want a property tax assessment system that is predictable and fair.

In this budget we introduce a better property tax assessment system based on a four-year cycle.

Avec ce budget, nous instaurons un meilleur système d'évaluation foncière qui repose sur un cycle de quatre ans.

It would begin in 2009 with the next reassessment. Any increase in value resulting from a reassessment would be phased in over four years. But reassessment decreases would apply immediately.

In the months ahead we will be working with municipalities to ensure that the details of the new system meet their needs.

But we are sure today that the reforms we propose will be welcomed by every homeowner in the province.

It would be welcomed particularly by those who thought that the only solution to assessment volatility was to impose an arbitrary cap—one that, as it turns out, would tend to favour the more affluent.

At the same time, we propose to cut higher business education tax rates and to make that system fairer.

Nous proposons de réduire les taux élevés de l'impôt scolaire applicable aux entreprises et de rendre le système plus équitable.

Len Crispino of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and Catherine Swift of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business identified this as a top priority.

It's easy to see why. It's simply unfair that a business in London pays business education tax at rates that are much higher than businesses across the way in Middlesex.

Unfair business education taxes have put communities like London, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Ottawa and others at an economic disadvantage. That has to stop.

Over the course of seven years, we will reduce business education tax rates in all municipalities where rates are higher than 1.6%—in other words, in most municipalities across the province.

Once that system is fully implemented, more than 500,000 Ontario businesses will benefit from this reduction.

No business will pay more under this plan.

What's more, new construction will benefit immediately from the 1.6% rate.

By 2014, business education taxes will have been reduced by \$540 million.

That is a significant saving, especially for small and medium-sized businesses.

We also plan to phase out social services pooling in the greater Toronto area.

Pooling has been an unfair burden on so many property taxpayers in municipalities in the greater Toronto area.

It will mean a \$200-million saving for those same municipalities.

It also means that, once again, we are uploading costs, while the previous administration downloaded.

A fairer, more competitive tax system is one of the best ways to encourage economic growth.

Later today, I will introduce legislation to eliminate the capital tax in Ontario on July 1, 2010. That is fully 18 months earlier than we had planned.

Our economy thrives when we turn great ideas into well-paying jobs.

That's why, under Premier McGuinty's leadership, we're already investing some \$1.7 billion over five years in research and innovation.

This year, for example, we will be providing \$57 million in funding to a number of institutions that work on groundbreaking environmental research projects.

One of those projects, at the University of Guelph, is looking, believe it or not, at how to make car parts from corn and wheat.

Innovation begins right here at home.

In this budget, we are announcing a \$50-million investment in Magna's innovation, training and commercialization centre.

It is a new global research and commercialization centre right here in Ontario.

Their first projects will focus on smarter manufacturing and more environmentally friendly cars.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind you that we are investing, in 2007-08, almost \$6 billion in new infrastructure.

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At the same time, we will also be moving ahead with the provincial-municipal fiscal and service delivery review, a process that will help determine the best way to fund and deliver services with our municipal partners.

We will continue to add strength to the key economic sectors and regions of the province, with dozens of new initiatives.

The province will create a new Ontario Manufacturing Council. The council will help increase the competitiveness of our manufacturers.

We are increasing the flexibility of the advanced manufacturing investment strategy so that more companies will qualify for support. That will help more manufacturers invest in more new technologies.

Manufacturers will also benefit from the expanded eligibility of the apprenticeship training tax credit, which we plan to extend until 2012.

Communities across Ontario will benefit from a 20% increase in annual funding for the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

We're also going to increase annual funding for the Ontario Arts Council by 38%. That's going to help over 10,000 arts organizations across Ontario.

We're providing more support for Ontario's libraries—some \$5 million in 2006–07.

We're making \$41 million available in new investments for various community, social, sports and recreation facilities.

Finally, because tourism is such an important part of our economy, we are providing additional resources to foster its growth—for example, a new convention centre in Niagara Falls.

I want to recognize my colleague the MPP for Niagara Falls, Kim Craiton, who, despite facing his own battles, has never stopped fighting on behalf of his constituents.

We're also taking specific measures to strengthen Ontario's northern and rural communities.

Nous prenons également certaines mesures pour renforcer les collectivités rurales et celles du nord de la province.

We're doubling our rural infrastructure investment initiative to \$140 million for improvements to water systems, roads, bridges and other priorities.

We'll be investing \$10 million to help expand broadband coverage in rural Ontario.

Today I am delighted to announce the appointment of a northwestern Ontario economic facilitator. His mandate will be to work with local people and businesses to help inspire a new generation of growth in the northwest. I am delighted that Bob Rosehart, president of Wilfrid Laurier University, has agreed to act as the facilitator. Dr.

Rosehart knows northwestern Ontario like few other people. He is with us in the gallery today and I would ask members to welcome him.

We are working on a variety of measures to secure the jobs of Ontario's forestry sector. This government is providing over \$1 billion in support for the forestry sector through initiatives like the forest sector prosperity fund.

Ontario farmers are the chief stewards of much of Ontario's arable land mass. They are also a vital part of our economy.

Since we came to office, we've provided over \$1 billion for farm income stabilization.

That's in addition to the tax measures that continue to save farming families hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

In this budget, we're making investments to expand the marketing of our agricultural products as well as provide financial support for the Ontario Bio-Auto Council and the BioCar initiative.

In the same speech in which the Premier spoke of child poverty, he urged another priority on Ontarians: the need for a climate change plan to create an Ontario that is less dependent on carbon—a greener Ontario.

Il s'agit alors d'établir un plan de lutte contre le changement climatique pour rendre l'Ontario moins tributaire du carbone et en faire un territoire plus vert.

In the Premier's own words, "It is an area where Ontario is commissioned by history to lead."

We have made real progress already.

We protected a greenbelt the size of Prince Edward Island.

We've invested billions in public transit.

We've reshaped development in southern Ontario with our award-winning Places to Grow plan.

We've brought in new laws and hired more personnel to ensure the safety of the water we drink.

We've added ethanol to our gasoline and initiated the fastest-growing alternative energy program in North America.

But there is much more to do.

Later this session, the Premier will present a detailed climate change plan to this House.

It will allow Ontario to take full responsibility for the defining challenge of our generation.

In the meantime, we are taking some important initial steps.

We are going to provide \$2 million to Trees Ontario—enough to plant over a million trees—because trees help reduce greenhouse gases.

We are going to provide homeowners with rebates of up to \$150 to help pay for individual home energy audits.

We are investing in the research and innovation needed to ensure that Ontario's automobile sector can be a global leader when it comes to alternative fuels and clean car technology.

If the recent federal budget is passed by Parliament, we will receive some \$586 million from the federal clean air and climate change trust.

Some of these funds will be dedicated to projects already underway. Some will support close to \$125 million in new initiatives in this budget. More than \$200 million will be allocated later for new projects.

I wish to close with an expression of gratitude: to say thank you to the people of this province. It's your inventiveness, your ambition, your hard work that has brought this province to an era of new economic strength.

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Merci d'abord aux gens de l'Ontario. C'est votre esprit inventif, votre ambition et votre ténacité qui ont permis à l'Ontario de retrouver sa vigueur économique.

I would also like to thank the thousands and thousands of women and men in the Ontario public service and the broader public sector who work with such passion and commitment every day of the year. Ontario's better public services are a tribute to you.

I want to say thanks also to the tireless tribe in the Ministry of Finance who worked with such energy to make this budget a powerful statement of our values and a fine description of our future together.

Within months, we will seek a new mandate from the people of Ontario.

And within weeks we will present the province's first ever pre-election financial report.

It will make the province's finances more transparent to political parties, to citizens and to voters.

That report, I believe, will confirm the central theme of this budget—that we are beginning an era of new economic strength in Ontario.

We are proud of our accomplishments thus far.

Ontario is growing again.

But there is much more to do and my preference is to look forward.

Yes, our schools are better, but we want to ensure that every child has a better chance to succeed.

Yes, wait times are shorter, but we want our health care system to be at its very best.

Yes, post-secondary education is expanding, but so too are the frontiers of knowledge.

Yes, we have eliminated the deficit, but that represents a beginning, not an end.

Yes, Ontario is in an era of new economic strength. But we ought not to rest.

There are timbers and hammers that await our hand.

And a still stronger future is within our grasp.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Further debate? The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: I request that the House revert to introduction of bills.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUDGET MEASURES AND INTERIM
APPROPRIATION ACT, 2007LOI DE 2007 SUR LES MESURES
BUDGÉTAIRES ET L'AFFECTATION
ANTICIPÉE DE CRÉDITS

Mr. Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 187, An Act respecting Budget measures, interim appropriations and other matters / Projet de loi 187, Loi concernant les mesures budgétaires, l'affectation anticipée de crédits et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr. Speaker, I have a message from His Honour.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2007, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The House adjourned at 1657.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. James K. Bartleman

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma-Manitoulin	Brown, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (L) Speaker / Président	Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)
Ancaster-Dundas- Flamborough-Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Haliburton-Victoria-Brock Halton	Scott, Laurie (PC) Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC) Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est	Horwath, Andrea (ND)
Beaches-East York / Beaches-York-Est	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hamilton Mountain	Boutrogianni, Hon. / L'hon. Marie (L) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)		Marsales, Judy (L)
Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	
Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Dhillon, Vic (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)		Mitchell, Carol (L)
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Huron-Bruce	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Burlington	Savoline, Joyce (PC)	Kenora-Rainy River	Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)		Milloy, John (L)
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement	Kitchener-Waterloo	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Dufferin-Peel- Wellington-Grey	Tory, John (PC) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	Lanark-Carleton	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L) Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail	London West / London-Ouest	Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	London-Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Markham	Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Minister of Revenue / ministre du Revenu
Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L) Minister of Small Business and Entrepreneurship / ministre des Petites Entreprises et de l'Entrepreneuriat
Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)		Fonseca, Peter (L)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Peterson, Tim (L)
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Delaney, Bob (L)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	MacLeod, Lisa (PC)
		Nepean-Carleton	Kormos, Peter (ND)
		Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	Craiton, Kim (L)
		Niagara Falls	

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)	Stormont–Dundas– Charlottenburgh Sudbury	Brownell, Jim (L)
Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)		Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)		Racco, Mario G. (L)
Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)		Mauro, Bill (L)
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Thornhill	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé		Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L) Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / vice-premier ministre, ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Tabuns, Peter (ND)
	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)		Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Oxford	DiNovo, Cheri (ND)	Toronto–Danforth	Sorbara, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Parkdale–High Park	Miller, Norm (PC)	Trinity–Spadina	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Parry Sound–Muskoka	Wilkinson, John (L)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Elliott, Christine (PC)
Perth–Middlesex	Leal, Jeff (L)		Zimmer, David (L)
Peterborough	Arthurs, Wayne (L)		Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Waterloo–Wellington	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Prince Edward–Hastings	Yakabuski, John (PC)		Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Di Cocco, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (L) Minister of Culture / ministre de la Culture	Whitby–Ajax	Munro, Julia (PC)
Sarnia–Lambton	Oraziotti, David (L)	Willowdale	Ferreira, Paul (ND)
Sault Ste. Marie	Duguid, Brad (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse	Windsor–St. Clair	
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux	York North / York-Nord	
Scarborough–Agincourt	Balkissoon, Bas (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Scarborough–Rouge River	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	York West / York-Ouest	
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L) Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, government House leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		
St. Catharines	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
St. Paul's	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		
Stoney Creek			

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 26 March 2007

Lundi 26 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 mars 2007

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I rise today and recognize the Minister of the Environment as the second most recent addition to the Dalton McGuinty promise-breakers' club. As Ontarians know, this club is jam-packed with McGuinty members who refuse to keep their promises.

During the election in 2003, in bright-red, promise-breaking Liberal ink Dalton McGuinty and Minister Broten stated, "The air we breathe is killing us. We will make our air cleaner and close those coal generation plants."

Dalton McGuinty not only broke his misguided promise to close the coal generation plants once, he then broke it a second and third time. In January, the minister completely abandoned her promise of 60% waste diversion, saying that Dalton McGuinty won't succeed in keeping another one of his biggest campaign promises to divert 60% of garbage from landfills by the end of 2008.

Although the minister had already stated that she has a plan for climate change, the environment commissioner's fall report indicated that Dalton McGuinty has no formal plan for climate change. In Dalton McGuinty's budget, the Minister of the Environment was all but ignored. Where was the Minister of the Environment during the budget process?

Let's recognize in advance that Dalton McGuinty is clearly relying on federal dollars to completely fund his responsibility for climate change programs.

Old habits die hard for Dalton McGuinty, and he certainly knows how to surround himself with the same kinds of people. He has ensured that the Minister of the Environment has solidified her place in the Dalton McGuinty promise-breakers' club.

JUICE GRAPE GROWERS

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Time is running out for Mike and Eileen Hildenbrandt. You see, they're farmers. They're down in Jordan and they've got 48 acres of juice grapes. Most of the 105 juice grape farmers in the province are located down in Niagara. Most of the 2,000 acres dedicated to juice grapes are

down there in that scarce and valuable vineyard land in Niagara.

Mike Hildenbrandt is the third generation of his family to be farming this same land. You can go down there if you want. It's at 15th Street and Regional Road 81, the original wine route. You see, when Cadbury Schweppes announced the closure of its grape juice processing plant in St. Catharines, we didn't just lose 26 more manufacturing jobs in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Those juice grape growers lost the market for their grapes, and there wasn't a penny for them, nothing for them in Dalton McGuinty's budget of last week—nothing. They were ignored. They were treated with disregard and disdain.

This anti-agricultural Ontario government with its anti-agricultural budget has left farmers in the lurch. On behalf of Mike and Eileen Hildenbrandt and hundreds of other good farmers who have been left to hang and dry, those juice grape growers, by Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, I say it's time they had their fair due.

HEALTHY LIVING

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): Today, I rise in the House to thank Mr. Watson for coming to London on March 1 and announcing that the McGuinty government is providing the city of London with \$4 million to upgrade the North London Optimist Community Centre as well as the Thames pool. This funding is part of the province's \$190-million economic stimulus plan.

Active life is crucial to good health. I'm certain that by upgrading the facilities, we are helping to encourage the people of London to participate in physical activities and achieve a better quality of life, especially our seniors' groups like Huff n' Puff.

The Minister of Health Promotion and the McGuinty government are investing in community infrastructure in areas such as sport, physical activity and recreation, which all address the government's focus on building a healthier Ontario.

By investing in and promoting healthy living and wellness, we are creating a better quality of life for all Ontarians.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in the House to point out a shocking pattern of neglect and inaction from the McGuinty government.

Today we heard the Ombudsman's report about the insider winning scandal at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Commission—or is it OLG? This is not the first report of the Ombudsman that shows this government is asleep at the switch. This is a government with no plan.

Shamefully, the Liberals do nothing until the Ombudsman or the Auditor General sounds the alarm bell. Only a month ago, the Ombudsman released his critical report and recommendations on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. He said the Ontario compensation system for crime victims “is hurting the very people it is supposed to help.” He called it scandalous.

We all recall the report of the Auditor General last year that followed the resignation of the CEO of Hydro One and the \$3-million severance package. Amongst other findings, the report of the Auditor General revealed several CAS executives getting \$50,000 SUVs.

1340

This pattern is simply disturbing. The McGuinty government is not a government that has a plan or shows any sort of leadership. Premier McGuinty does nothing until he is shamed into action. The rest of the time, it is as if their eyes are closed, listening to their own records, with their hand in your pocket at all times.

This government has no plan, and only responds to reports from the Auditor General or, today, the Ombudsman.

EDUCATION

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): When our government was first elected in 2003, we found that students and educators were struggling under the imprudent political decisions of the prior government. Education budgets had been slashed, classes were overcrowded, there were frequent labour disputes, and special education services had drastically reduced. As a result, an alarmingly low number of students were meeting basic standards or graduating.

In contrast to that once-grim picture, this government has improved education in Ontario. We are meeting our commitments, and today the education system is no longer failing our students. We now know that test scores across the province have risen at least 10 percentage points.

In Ottawa, students are showing even greater improvement. For example, grade 3 reading achievement has risen by 13 and 14 percentage points in the French and English school boards respectively. And more than 80% of grade 10 students are reaching or exceeding provincial standards.

The high school graduation rate has also risen from 68% to 73%, which means 20,000 more students are graduating. Class sizes have been drastically reduced to 20 students in 65% of classes. Furthermore, 93% of classes have 23 students or less. Ottawa's public school boards will receive funding for more than 50 new primary teachers to help reduce class sizes further for the 2007-08 year.

It is this hard work by our government that is making a difference in the lives of our students over the last four years, and we will continue to strive for even greater improvements for the future of our children.

RURAL ONTARIO

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Municipal officials in eastern Ontario were anxiously awaiting the provincial budget last Thursday. After all, they've been very active in bringing their concerns to the attention of the McGuinty Liberals, both directly and through their MPPs. They truly believed that they'd made a solid case that could not be ignored even by this anti-rural Liberal government.

How disappointed they were when the budget was tabled. There is little or nothing to indicate that the urban-centred McGuinty-ites were ever listening to them. As Doug Struthers, chair of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, said, “This budget fails to address major problems that ‘threaten the economic health’ of rural communities in eastern Ontario.”

Where is the eastern Ontario prosperity fund as proposed by Lanark–Carleton MPP Norman Sterling? Where is the eastern Ontario secretariat as proposed by Leeds–Grenville MPP Bob Runciman? Where is the share of the gas tax revenue for rural communities as proposed by myself in my private member's Bill 3? As one member of the wardens' caucus said to me, “At least the federal government recognizes rural people by giving us a fair share of the gas tax that we pay.” It is clear that the Liberals have written off rural Ontario, hitting eastern Ontario especially hard.

If I were a Liberal member in rural Ontario, I'd be very worried that my Premier is prepared to sacrifice my seat to keep his limo. Unlike the Liberals, John Tory and the PC caucus continue to work for the people of eastern Ontario while Dalton McGuinty abandons them. Shame.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I'm delighted to rise today to highlight just some of the tremendous good news that's contained in the 2007 provincial budget for the good people of the riding of Brant.

As you know, brownfield cleanup has been a particular concern of mine, the city of Brantford and the citizens of Brant, especially the people living near these dangerous sites. I'm very happy to report that a \$5-million allocation has been made to assist in the cleanup of the Mohawk–Greenwich site once and for all, in partnership with the municipality and the federal government. Additionally, another \$2.24-million allocation has been made for an affordable housing project to be completed on a brownfield site.

That's good news, but it doesn't end there, as almost \$700,000 has been allocated to the county of Brant to build a new public library in Burford, Ontario; \$745,000 from the transit trust has been allocated to projects in

Brant; and \$30,000 for improvements to the safety of Highway 24. And \$97,000 has been allocated to centres providing care for children and adults in special-needs situations, such as the Lansdowne treatment centre, Community Living Brant and Brantwood Centre.

These allocations speak to this budget's direction and strength, including a balanced and predictable increase to the minimum wage to over \$10 per hour. This approach is the proper way to address low wages in Ontario.

First, the MRI, then the FHT, then the CHT. These measures represent smart investments in health care, education and now brownfields. In the last year alone, my riding has received \$90 million and as—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. The member for Oakville.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to rise today and talk about the great riding of Oakville and what our government's done for families to help expand opportunities and turn around the damage and the cuts, the neglect and the deficits of the previous government. With the recent budget announcements, Oakville and Halton region have received those important investments they need that create stronger communities and healthier families.

Some of the key investments for this area include, finally, an end to the GTA social service pooling, saving Halton taxpayers more than \$40 million annually when fully phased out. As well, property tax reform creates a more predictable and fair tax assessment system, saving local businesses over \$7 million in business education tax. There's over \$1.2 million to improve transit, and that's on top of the \$2.2 million we've already invested.

While some members opposite want to take Ontario backwards by cutting over \$2.5 billion from our health care system and want to take necessary funding from public education and put it into private schools, we know that Ontarians are choosing our way. We know there's always more to do, but the McGuinty Liberals are working hard for the people of this province and those in my riding of Oakville, and are committed to progress and the creation of new opportunities for all people in this province.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): The latest budget from the McGuinty Liberals is doing great things to help expand opportunities for all Ontarians. Through investing in what counts, like our children, our health care, our education system and our environment, we recognize the need to continue laying the building blocks for a vibrant and sustainable future. Through providing an additional \$2.1 billion to help children and families, the new Ontario child benefit will aid close to 1.3 million children per year when fully implemented. Experts in the field have been quick to send positive feedback.

Gail Nyberg, executive director of the Daily Bread Food Bank, had this to say about the latest Ontario budget: "It's been a long time since poverty reduction measures were at the forefront of a provincial budget in Ontario. We congratulate the Ontario government for having the courage to take on this significant issue, and

we expect to see a reduction in food bank use in the coming years as a result."

The McGuinty Liberals have brought in \$125 million in immediate environmental initiatives, which include rebates for home energy audits and funding to help plant trees through the Trees Ontario Foundation. In the area of health, we're providing more money to strengthen our public health care system and bring down wait times. In education, we're working hard for students and children through increasing funding for necessary resources to schools across the province.

As the title from an article in the Toronto Star today notes, "Tory Offers Little New as Election Approaches." This has become typical of the Leader of the Opposition. We can't go back and we will not go back.

VISITORS

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: A unique situation occurred today in terms of meeting with my constituents. I have in the gallery right now Karen and David Anderson and their daughter, Bailey, who have joined us because they've supported a charity and bought a lunch with Dave. Boy, I don't know why anyone would want to do that but, quite frankly, they came here to learn the workings of the House, and I invited them for the first time. They're very strong members in my riding. I welcome them here today and thank them for being here to learn about democracy.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to take this opportunity to welcome one of my constituents and the candidate for the PC Party for the next election, Cathy Galt.

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REPORT, OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table a report of the Ombudsman concerning the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.

VISITING CLERK

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Members, please join me in welcoming Gail Bennett, table officer from the Northwest Territories, who is on attachment with our table this week. Welcome.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 62(c), the supplementary estimates 2006-07 before the committee of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Health

Promotion, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, the Ministry of Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and the Ministry of Transportation are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Pursuant to standing order 61(c), the reported supplementary estimates 2006-07 of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, the Ministry of Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Transportation, not selected for consideration, are deemed to be concurred in.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SUPPLY ACT, 2007

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2007

Mr. Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 188, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007 / *Projet de loi 188, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2007.*

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Does the minister wish to make a brief statement?

Interjection.

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? The member for Scarborough Centre.

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE MEMORIAL DAY ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LE JOUR COMMÉMORATIF DU GÉNOCIDE ARMÉNIEN

Mr. Duguid moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 189, An Act to proclaim April 24 Armenian Genocide Memorial Day / *Projet de loi 189, Loi proclamant le 24 avril Jour commémoratif du génocide arménien.*

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried?

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): This bill is similar to a motion passed in the Quebec legislative assembly in 2003. What it does is designate April 24 of each year as Armenian Genocide Memorial Day.

It's essential that we remember and learn from the atrocities that have taken place throughout human history in order to ensure that such crimes against humanity are not perpetrated in the future. If healing of the wounds caused by the Armenian genocide of 1915 is to occur,

recognition of what happened must first be acknowledged. This bill recognizes the Armenian genocide and provides a day to reflect on this crime against humanity in hopes that through recognition, peace, harmony and understanding will eventually be able to prevail.

Joining us in the gallery today in support of this bill are a number of people from the Armenian community, including genocide survivors. I'd like to introduce a few of them now, if I may: the Armenian Community Centre of Toronto and all the organizations that operate under this centre: the Armenian National Committee of Toronto and Canada; the Armenian Students' Association of Ontario; students of the ARS high school, principal, teaching staff and board members; St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church; St. Gregory's Armenian Catholic Church; Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church of Toronto, the Armenian Evangelical Church; the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Zoryan Institute, the Canadian Armenian Business Council, and, most especially, I would like to introduce genocide survivor Mr. Diran Terzian and Robert Adourian, son of Paul Adourian, who was a member of the Georgetown Boys.

VISITORS

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise to acknowledge the great contribution that the Legions of Ontario have made, and especially the Legion in Port Credit. A lot of people know the great work they do in veterans' affairs on Remembrance Day, but don't know that they also run literacy and poster contests. Today we have two members who ran this contest in Port Credit and brought six of the winners down with them. I would like to acknowledge Russ and Faye Bradshaw, the people from the Legion, and with them are Oliver Barquin, Eric Zheng, Nicholas Koschate, Andreas Mantas, Christina Muia and Daniel Broadus.

MOTIONS

REFERRAL OF BILLS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding three private members' bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move:

That the March 30, 2006, order of the House referring Bill 67, An Act to amend various Acts to require a declaration with respect to the donation of organs and tissue on death, to the standing committee on social policy be discharged and that the bill be referred instead to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly;

That the December 7, 2006, order of the House referring Bill 161, An Act respecting employment agencies, to the standing committee on general government be discharged and the bill be referred instead to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly;

That the November 30, 2006, order of the House referring Bill 164, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, the Environmental Protection Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act to the standing committee on regulations and private bills be discharged and the bill be referred instead to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly; and

That, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times, the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. on Thursday mornings to consider Bill 67, An Act to amend various Acts to require a declaration with respect to the donation of organs and tissue on death; Bill 161, An Act respecting employment agencies; and Bill 164, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, the Environmental Protection Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Monday, March 26, 2007, Tuesday, March 27, 2007, and Wednesday, March 28, 2007, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has moved government notice of motion number 288. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1401 to 1406.

The Speaker: Will members please take their seats. All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Balkissoon, Bas	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Peterson, Tim
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Rinaldi, Lou
Chan, Michael	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Smitherman, George
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Patten, Richard	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	MacLeod, Lisa	Prue, Michael
DiNovo, Cheri	Marchese, Rosario	Savoline, Joyce
Dunlop, Garfield	Martel, Shelley	Tascona, Joseph N.
Ferreira, Paul	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tory, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	Yakubski, John
Hudak, Tim	Murdoch, Bill	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 50; the nays are 23.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RENDEMENT SCOLAIRE

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne (Minister of Education): I rise in the House today to announce that in total, 12,000 additional students have graduated from high school over the past two years. This is thanks to a five percentage point rise in the graduation rate during those two years, and we expect even more students will be wearing cap and gown when the current school year finishes. This is great news for the province of Ontario and a clear sign that our partnerships with parents, teachers, employers and others are making a difference in the lives of students.

We have a shared vision—more graduates with a lifetime of opportunities—and we agree that allowing students to slip between the cracks is simply no longer acceptable. That's why our government launched the student success strategy over three years ago with the advice and support of our partners. This is a strategy focused on reaching every student. We're doing that with more high-quality learning choices and one-on-one attention from teachers. We're so confident in this strategy that we expect a graduation rate of 85% by 2010-11. This is a significant boost from 68% in 2003-04 and it means, most importantly, that 20,000 additional students will graduate every year once the target has been achieved. I'm proud to repeat that the rate over the past two years has already climbed five percentage points, to 73%.

This increase directly relates to the positive changes we've made in the high school experience. We've funded 1,600 additional high school teachers since 2004, et nous en finançons 320 de plus l'année prochaine. We're going to fund 320 more next year.

We want more teachers in our schools because we respect their dedication to teaching every student, every day. Most of the new teachers are part of student success

teams. These teams are in every high school, keeping students focused on graduation. For example, their work includes new credit recovery programs. These programs allow students to return to a course they failed and complete the required units for credit. Students also have more learning choices to customize their education to their individual skills and ambitions for the future. As part of the high schools major initiative, they are now majoring in construction, hospitality, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, primary industries, and arts and culture. Our students have greater access to co-operative education and can count co-op courses for up to two of their mandatory credits.

What all of this means is that more students can gain valuable hands-on skills and knowledge in the workplace, and there are thousands of success stories already that demonstrate our plan is working.

Catarina Robalo is just one of them. She's a grade 12 student at St. Edmund Campion Secondary School in Mississauga. She used to hate school and skipped often. Now she's back on track to graduate because of the help of the student success team. The team helped her finish the classes she had failed and refocus on her education. Now she is excited about graduation and applying for college to become a dental hygienist. A rising graduation rate and stories like Catarina's are clear indications that we're headed in the right direction.

Notre gouvernement est déterminé à faire du système d'éducation public de l'Ontario le meilleur au monde, and we are doing that by listening to students and respecting them as individuals. We're also partnering with teachers and other educators to ensure all new learning choices are high-quality and relevant. I'm certain that public confidence in education will continue to rise, because I believe there is a consensus in Ontario that young people should have opportunities. Our investments and partnerships are helping more students reach their full potential. L'Ontario prospérera à l'avenir parce que nous travaillons ensemble aujourd'hui pour aider les élèves à réussir.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I would like to respond to this particular announcement. I would say to the minister that the people in Durham are not too happy about your supposed partnership. Certainly, it's causing a lot of chaos for the students in that community.

But I also think the minister needs to take an honest look at what's been happening in the province. Statistics Canada recently reported that between 1993 and 2003, the provincial dropout rate fell by 5.6%, or 40,000 students. I think it's important that in this House we acknowledge that a trend has been underway. The NDP, the Conservatives and now the Liberals have all been committed to ensuring that our students in our schools achieve success. I think it's important that that happen. Indeed, some of the results we're seeing today are because of the literacy and numeracy tests that we put in place and also the program of students at risk. This

enabled us to identify student problems early and work to resolve them and help students achieve success.

However, the minister also needs to take a hard look at what she hasn't done, and there are many things. Last week my colleague the member for Oak Ridges inducted her into the Dalton McGuinty promise-breakers' club.

Interjection: Charter member.

Mrs. Witmer: I think she's one of the charter members. One of the things is, this government is not keeping our students safe. We are seeing increasingly dangerous levels of supervision.

That is being said not by us but by Blair Hilts, the president of the Ontario Principals' Council, who wrote recently, "There has been a reduction in supervision at both the elementary and secondary levels, creating a supervision gap that has not been adequately filled. That gap has negatively impacted student safety and the learning environment in our schools."

Furthermore, this minister has not fixed the funding formula that was recommended by Dr. Rozanski when we have known about it for three years and you had the opportunity to do so. Instead, we've seen the slashing of programs, the firing of support staff and instability throughout dozens of school boards. We are seeing no results from Dalton McGuinty whatsoever on the funding formula.

Furthermore, Dalton McGuinty has failed newcomers and those with special needs. You have forced boards to raid those funds that are being provided in order to balance their budgets. Also, you have broken almost every education promise that you have made. Recently, you were forced to retreat, to back down, from your hard class size cap because we were seeing, number one, an increasing number of portables at our schools, plus we were seeing up to three grades in one class.

So in the face of growing class size and growing number of portables, the Dalton McGuinty government had to retreat from a key plank in your election platform of 2003. How can anybody believe anything that Dalton McGuinty says? How can anyone trust him?

Furthermore, we take a look at your moratorium. You have failed to honour and keep your promise on your own moratorium on school closures. You have closed 150 schools. You have let the people in this province down.

Furthermore, you have failed to meet your own deadline on standardized tests, and now you're moving it into the next decade. You're extending the deadline indefinitely. People in this province are very disappointed. They can't believe anything that you say; any promises that you've made, you've broken them. Dalton McGuinty is not to be trusted. When it comes to education, this province has been let down by this minister and we have been slipping under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, whether it's safety in our schools or whether it's slashing newcomer and special education budgets, you are putting more and more of our students at risk each and every day.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I want to say to the Minister of Education that we do not share

your enthusiasm with graduation rates. We would if we thought for one minute they were indicative of higher success rates in our schools. Unfortunately, like the education quality assessment office results, the government is more concerned with generating a politically useful number than with ensuring the real achievement and future success of students. In order to pad the numbers, secondary teachers have been put under extraordinary pressure to pass students.

According to the OSSTF Education Forum magazine, teachers are feeling pressure to "adjust failing marks." From the same article, teachers are concerned about a system which "allows late assignments to go unpenalized, plagiarized essays to be rewritten, absolute guidelines to be repeatedly extended, unsubmitted work to be accepted after the semester is over, and obvious failures to be overturned." I know you smile at that, Minister, because you're very well familiar with this stuff.

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Teachers report that the student success teachers that the government is so proud of in many cases spend more time trying to negotiate a change in the grade than they do working with students to legitimately improve the grade. Just last week, in fact, I met a secondary school teacher who's thinking of quitting because he's tired of being told by the principal when he should regrade his students and give them a passing grade.

The credit recovery process is described by many as a token rubber stamp program where enrolment virtually guarantees a credit.

Rather than create real programming, the government has come up with Bill 52, which effectively contracts out the education of the most needy children in the province to guarantee their graduation, without any concern for their real education. I say that Bill 52 virtually guarantees that the programs that will be taught will be taught by non-teachers. In fact, any Tom, Dick, Harry and/or Mary can run such a program.

Under Bill 52, the minister will have to sign off on every program until the election. After the election, the minister doesn't have to do that any more. And you wonder why people become cynical.

These phony numbers announcements will not take the place of real alternative programs, adequate special education services and more supports in the classroom. Educational assistants, custodians, secretaries and technical staff are working harder and longer to try to provide quality of education. School boards are raiding capital funds. They're putting off much-needed school maintenance. They're selling chocolate bars and holding skip-a-thons to support their schools. Parents are waiting, as I am, for you to stop making announcements and give Ontario school boards the resources they need to actually deliver excellence in education. Hundreds of striking support workers from the Durham public school board came all the way to Queen's Park to let you know that you haven't solved the problems in our schools.

We say, Minister, that you must fix the failed education funding formula so that our hard-working support

workers and teachers have the tools they need to make education in Ontario work. Don't waste your time and ours with these announcements. Frankly, we expected better from this government. We are giving you—I am giving you—a failing grade, Minister, and so are the people of Ontario, and there won't be any success teachers to change your grade.

VISITORS

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke):

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'd like to draw the members' attention to the members' gallery west, where we have in attendance Mohamed Kassim, Monte McNaughton, Chris Savard, Rick Byers and Cathy Galt, who are all recently nominated candidates on behalf of the PC Party. I'm sure that I speak for members on both sides of this House when I say welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the minister responsible for the lottery corporation. This morning, the Ombudsman called the minister's bluff. He released his report on the growing lottery scandal that has engulfed the McGuinty government. This is a scandal that first came to light last October with reports of so-called lottery insiders winning at a greater rate than statistically they should. The Ombudsman suggests that these problems have mushroomed on Dalton McGuinty's watch.

The minister claimed this afternoon that he didn't know about any insider wins until 10 days before the CBC ran its report last fall.

My question to the minister is this: Why didn't you know about this any sooner? Did anybody in your office or any of your officials know anything about this before the 10-day period prior to the television broadcast, and, if so, exactly when did they know and what did they know? When did they know anything and what did they know about these details before you yourself said you knew?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): First of all, I want to commend the Ombudsman for the work that he's done. I believe it's a fair and balanced report.

This government and all members of this government, myself included, believe the public trust is paramount. That's why we took very specific action when these allegations, serious as they are, were brought to light. That's why I wrote Mr. Gough, the board chair. He brought in KPMG. The Ombudsman, in fact, has recommended that all of KPMG's recommendations be implemented.

But it didn't just end there. The member for York North chaired an all-party legislative committee to provide oversight of Ontario Lottery and Gaming, and that committee commended many of the efforts that were made to date.

This government has always treated these matters with the seriousness that they were brought to light. I would quote the Ombudsman, who says in his report on page 69, "I am happy to see that both the government and OLG appear to be headed in the right direction."

Mr. Tory: Of course, what he's pointing out is that they appear to be headed in the right direction, and after he caught them. The point is, when the minister talks about the public trust, it only becomes paramount with Dalton McGuinty and company when they get caught, and that's when they start to do anything whatsoever.

The answer that you gave is very disconcerting because it goes to the very heart of ministerial responsibility. This is a \$6-billion-a-year corporation that thousands and millions of Ontarians do business with every day. You appoint the board of directors and that board of directors reports to you—not to anybody else, not to the Ombudsman, not to the CBC. They report to you.

For the minister not to know until 10 days before a CBC report what is going on in this multibillion dollar corporation owned by the public and for which he is responsible is a disgrace, and it's why Ontario taxpayers have a very serious concern about this.

My question for Dalton McGuinty's minister is this: Who within your office knew about these insider wins, when did they know, and why didn't the McGuinty government act sooner, before it was exposed by the CBC and by the Ombudsman? Why didn't you do anything about this sooner and act in the public interest?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I don't agree with the characterization of the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, the Fifth Estate broadcast their program making the allegations, and even the Ombudsman says in this report that statistics like those produced on the program are not kept. He does recommend that they do be kept. In fact, we have embraced all of the recommendations of the Ombudsman and will follow through and make sure they are implemented.

That information was never kept when the member's party was in government nor when the third party was in government, and the leader of the official opposition full well knows that.

I would quote the Ombudsman's report yet again. On page 68 he says, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

No one in this House or in this province should doubt our sincere desire to implement these changes and restore the public trust.

Mr. Tory: The Ombudsman is commenting on the fact that you acted after you got caught. It's the Dalton McGuinty way: Stick your head in the sand, pretend you don't hear anything and hope you don't get caught. That

is the Dalton McGuinty way. It's applied to so many things, now including the Ontario lottery corporation, and it's when you're not paying attention to things like people spending \$6 million of the taxpayers' money to change the logo of the lottery corporation. That's what happens when you're asleep at the switch.

Even now, you're standing up in your place and pretending the problem is solved. Mr. Brown has walked the plank and we should all just go back to sleep, led by Dalton McGuinty, who was asleep through most of this to begin with.

Why is the minister stonewalling? Why won't you get up and indicate that you know that beyond the reaction to this report, which is the tip of the iceberg, there is much more to be done, that a full and complete investigation is necessary to get to the bottom of everything so that we can make sure the taxpayers who buy the tickets know that this place is properly run and that the games are run with integrity? Why won't you ask for that investigation?

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Hon. Mr. Caplan: The leader of the official opposition should listen to the answer before he reads the prepared question.

We've had the standing committee on government agencies, chaired by a member of your caucus, sir; we've had an independent officer of this Legislature; we've had one of Canada's leading audit firms review this matter. In fact, I believe they're the auditor for your company previously and for your party.

If the member wants answers to questions of what happened in 2001, when Mr. Edmonds was in fact so disrespectfully treated, I suggest he turn to his left and ask the minister at the time, the member from Erie-Lincoln, Mr. Hudak, "Come forward. What did you know? When did you know it? Why did you take those actions at that time?"

This government has taken immediate action, and the Ombudsman in fact has verified it. He commends myself and the government for our openness and our responsiveness to the report and to the recommendations. All Ontarians should be confident the Ombudsman's—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

Mr. Tory: My question again is to the Minister of Infrastructure Renewal. Again, he's on the same approach today. They got caught and now they're saying, "Don't worry. We fixed it all," but in fact they stayed with their head in the sand for months and months and months.

Now, the last time that your government found itself mired in yet another scandal, a few months ago, there were questions never answered satisfactorily to this day about whether or not the head of Hydro One quit or was fired.

We do know this. We do know that the Dalton McGuinty government became the first in history, when they claimed someone quit, nonetheless to pay him five million bucks of taxpayers' money on the way out the

door—this \$5-million handout to a guy who supposedly quit his job. It's an unheard-of concept.

Now today, the lottery corporation announced that Duncan Brown is going to be vacationing with Tom Parkinson at the taxpayers' expense because he's getting paid more than \$700,000 of taxpayers' money for his trouble. The question is, did Duncan Brown quit or was he fired? Will the minister get up and tell us, did he quit or was he fired?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Board chair Michael Gough was very clear in the media conference earlier today that Mr. Brown and the board reached a mutual consensus that a separation was what was appropriate at the time, and I concur.

Mr. Tory: You know, that sort of non-answer is an insult to the taxpayers of this province because what they know for sure is, notwithstanding that rubbish about a mutual agreement or whatever it was he said, they're on the hook for \$700,000 of their money.

Now, the failure to provide a straightforward answer means that all of your talk about transparency and openness is nothing more than empty words. But worse than that, we're beginning to see a disturbing trend. The government said that Tom Parkinson quit as the head of Hydro One, and yet when he quit his job, you paid him \$5 million. Now we're saying Duncan Brown reached some accommodation with somebody and you paid him more than \$700,000, apparently in hush money. What does this say to the people of Ontario, who place their trust in you to manage their money and to oversee the lottery corporation, that time and time again we see people leaving under questionable circumstances and you pay them huge sums of public money in order to do that? If he quit, as you suggest he might have, why did he get a \$700,000-plus golden handshake from you on the way out—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Again, I would remind the leader of the official opposition, he might want to listen to the answer before he continues with his prepared written question and his manufactured rage.

The answer is quite clearly this: There was a contract in place between Mr. Brown and the Ontario lottery corporation board. That contract was adhered to. The two parties came to an agreement about how the separation should take place. It was at their own doing.

The public of Ontario should know that I very much believe that we have a contract with the people of Ontario to make sure that the confidence and trust in this organization is in place and the necessary steps will be taken to make sure that the public interest is paramount. The Ombudsman's recommendations will be implemented, as will the KPMG recommendations. This member or any other member should have full confidence that public trust and confidence will be restored in this organization.

Mr. Tory: The minister still has not answered the question as to whether Mr. Brown quit or was fired. He still hasn't answered question. He has made reference to

a contract, and he should bring that contract to this House and table it here today, if not tomorrow for sure.

My question to the minister is this: If you're so concerned about public confidence in the lottery corporation and your government, why would this happen, as is reported, on Wednesday night? In any other public corporation of this size, if there was some agreement reached that the chief executive officer would leave, it would have been made public at the latest the next day. It's a material change, and yet your government chose to cover this up, trying to wait until this morning to indicate that the CEO had left the company. You have done something here that is going to cost the taxpayers—the one thing you haven't disputed is, whatever it is you call it, and I suspect you're going to say that he quit in the end—\$700,000-plus of their money.

Why won't you come clean on whether he was fired or he quit? Why won't you come clean with his contract and table it in the House so we can all see? If he did quit, why are you paying him \$700,000?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I couldn't be any more clear to the leader of the official opposition. In fact, Mr. Brown and the board came to their mutual agreement on Friday. Shortly after that, the first phone call was to the Ombudsman to let him know what had happened. Right after that, a press release was issued by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. So, quite contrary to what the member opposite, in his fake indignation and mock rage—quite clearly, the appropriate actions have been taken to let the public know what is happening when it's known at that time.

The Speaker: New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a question for the minister in charge of the Ontario lottery corporation.

Minister, you became minister, as I understand it, in June 2005. Just before that, a judge of the Ontario Court ruled that the lottery corporation knew that retailers might steal from the lottery corporation and from other innocent people and, therefore, the lottery corporation had a responsibility to lottery players like Bob Edmonds.

In my experience here, you would have been briefed on that. Are you telling the people of Ontario today that when you became minister in charge of the lottery corporation, nobody talked about these unfortunate goings-on at the lottery corporation? Nobody briefed you on some of the recent history at the Ontario lottery corporation and some of the problems that had arisen?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: In fact, the Bob Edmonds case began in 2001, as I had indicated earlier. Mr. Hudak, the member from Erie–Lincoln, was the minister at the time. If you have any questions, turn two seats to your right and ask Mr. Hudak what actions he took at the time.

As I indicated, the Fifth Estate engaged in an investigation. It was broadcast in October 2006. This government—myself and the chair of the board—took swift and decisive action to make sure that there would be full cooperation. KPMG was called in. A legislative officer in

the Ombudsman's office took a look at this corporation and has made important recommendations in order that the public trust and confidence in this public corporation would be well maintained.

That's what I'm doing and that's what the Ombudsman has called for, and that's why he says in his report that he commends the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to the report and to the recommendations.

Mr. Hampton: I'm talking about the situation that prevailed when and as you became minister. Not only did the Ontario lottery corporation lose a court case with respect to Mr. Edmonds, but the Ontario lottery corporation, on March 17, 2005, just before you became minister, had to make a significant out-of-court settlement, a financial payment to Mr. Edmonds because it had wronged him. Are you saying that when you became minister, nobody briefed you about that? None of the officials of the ministry, none of the officials from the lottery corporation, came in and brought you up to speed as to what was happening, the out-of-court settlement and the loss of a court case? Are you saying that no one briefed you, that you remained completely asleep and in the dark?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Mr. Edmonds was treated disrespectfully and not in the way that I think a crown corporation should, as I have said here in this House. I've apologized to Mr. Edmonds. I've expressed my regret. The chair of the board of Ontario Lottery and Gaming had Duncan Brown, the former CEO, call and contact Mr. Edmonds directly and apologize for the treatment which had begun, unfortunately, at a previous time.

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The Ombudsman has said that this corporation is clearly conflicted and needs to split off the sales and marketing and the oversight provision. We've accepted that recommendation from the Ombudsman. I've contacted my colleague the Minister of Government Services, who met with the Ombudsman as early as Friday, to begin the steps forward in order to make sure that the proper oversight—that the conflict when the corporation was originally struck under the NDP is resolved and—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: I hear a lot of blah blah blah, but no answer to the question. Look, you became the minister of a corporation that does \$6 billion in business, a corporation that goes out there to ordinary Ontarians and says, "Buy our product. You can trust us." There were already situations in the media, in the courts, where it was clear that there was insider fraud taking place. My question has been, were you briefed?

I'm going to ask you another question. The media was also interested. The Toronto Star disclosed the summer after you became minister that the lottery corporation had spent almost half a million dollars trying to silence Mr. Edmonds. Were you briefed about that? Were you informed about those situations, or were you happy to remain asleep and in the dark?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The Ombudsman did quite a thorough review. All of the history indicated that there were significant problems with the lottery corporation. He highlights 1999 and 2001 as years where there were significant problems. I truly believe it was because the corporation, in the Ombudsman's words, had this apparent conflict within it because it was set up poorly by the New Democrats when they originally set up the corporation.

The Ombudsman's recommendations are divided into two main categories: operational and oversight and regulatory changes. I can tell this member that 17 of the 60 recommendations have already been implemented and 25 will be implemented by the end of June. Work has begun on the remaining 18, and they will be implemented as quickly as possible. That is incredible speed and determination and seriousness from this minister, from this government, on behalf of the people—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

Mr. Hampton: To the same minister. Here's the situation: The OLG loses a court case to Mr. Edmonds. It is covered in the media just before you become minister. The Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. is forced to compensate him to the tune of \$200,000. That is in the media. Then the Toronto Star discloses in the summer of 2005, after you become minister, that the OLG has spent almost half a million dollars trying to silence Mr. Edmonds.

My question again is, were you briefed on any of these things? Were you told about these things when you became minister, or were you happy, as many McGuinty ministers are, to remain asleep and in the dark, saying, "I hear nothing, I see nothing and I know nothing"?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The member, unfortunately, does a disservice to this House. His comments are not factual. I know that the member would want to acknowledge, as the Ombudsman has, that this government has treated this matter with the seriousness in which it has been brought up and has taken decisive action in order to implement the plan.

But I can go further than that. The Ombudsman made some comments earlier today at his morning press conference, and in light of those comments, I have directed Ontario Lottery and Gaming to turn over all of the files reviewed by the Ombudsman and any other relevant files to the OPP for review. We will today be asking the OPP to review the matter raised by the Ombudsman, and it is they who will determine whatever necessary steps should be taken.

Mr. Hampton: Shortly after you became minister, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. tried to use a gag order to stop Mr. Edmonds from going to the media. This is pretty serious—a government agency taking a 78-year-old man who has been the subject of fraud by that government agency, who has been fought by that government agency back and forth through the courts—and now they're going to try to silence him. Would they have come to you, Minister? Would either ministerial staff or OLG officials have come to you and talked to you about a government agency trying to silence a 78-year-old man

who had been the subject of fraud? Are you saying you weren't briefed on that, you weren't told about that either, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I just want to say quite clearly, I have spoken to this matter. I have apologized to Mr. Edmonds. I can't comment on what former minister Hudak directed his officials to do, why the treatment of Mr. Edmonds was the way that it was. I certainly regret that and I think all members of this House would agree that Mr. Edmonds was treated disrespectfully and improperly. I think all members of this House would want to know that action was taken to make sure that this kind of problem, that this kind of treatment of an Ontario citizen, did not happen again. I would think all members of this House would want the Ombudsman's review and his recommendations to be embraced so it did not happen to another member of the Ontario public.

Speaker, I can assure you and all members of this House and all citizens of Ontario that this government is taking quick and decisive action to implement the recommendations of the Ombudsman to ensure that the public trust and confidence is in place.

Mr. Hampton: Innocent Ontarians have been ripped off to the tune of millions of dollars while this minister sat in his chair and pretended to be asleep. Hospitals and charities have been taken to the cleaners while this minister sat in his chair and didn't have the common sense to ask even routine questions. Tell me, Minister, is that what you think the definition of a cabinet minister is: You collect the salary, you ride in the limousine, but you don't ask any questions?

With all of this happening—with the court decision, with the financial payout, with almost half a million dollars being spent trying to fight Mr. Edmonds, with this same agency trying to silence him—did you ever at any point as a cabinet minister ask, "What's going on here? Is there a problem here?" Did you ever ask any questions whatsoever, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I think the Ombudsman, an impartial officer of this Legislature, has spoken quite clearly when he says, "I commend the minister and government for its openness and responsiveness," and where he says, "I'm happy to see that both the government and the OLG appear to be headed in the right direction."

Work on the front of implementing the Ombudsman's recommendations has already begun. Some 8,800 self-checking devices have been made available and will be fully rolled out by the end of June. We've lowered the threshold on the "insider win" policy to \$50,000 from \$100,000. We've escalated all insider wins to corporate service and surveillance. We've brought in the Ombudsman to help us in the design of the proper regulatory oversight.

This government has taken appropriate and decisive action to make sure that the public trust and confidence is maintained. I certainly regret that past governments were afraid to take these kinds of steps, but the people of Ontario should have and do have full confidence that appropriate action is being taken.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Tory: A question for the minister for the lottery corporation. "Bold action when caught": That's one of the mottos of the McGuinty government—bold action when completely exposed by the CBC, the Toronto Star, Mr. Edmonds' lawyers and anybody else. Don't ever act on your own.

I only want to correct one thing that the leader of the New Democratic Party said. He suggested that the minister was sitting in his chair pretending to be asleep. The minister was in his chair and he was asleep, doing nothing, absolutely nothing. The minister didn't bother to ask. He sold out the people who buy the tickets day in and day out in this province. He sold them out. He abdicated his responsibility for a \$6-billion corporation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, so we can try to get to the bottom of this instead of all this wind that we're having from the other side, I ask the minister a simple question. Will you table all of the memos, all of the briefing notes and all of the correspondence between yourself and your office and the lottery corporation concerning the matters in dispute here so that we can all see what you knew, when you knew it, and what you did about it? We know the answer to the last question is "nothing," but would you table this material so we can all see?

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Hon. Mr. Caplan: For all the fake outrage and indignation from the member opposite—a member of his own caucus chairs an all-party legislative committee to look into Ontario Lottery and Gaming. We have an independent officer of the Legislature, Mr. Marin, who prepares a well-balanced and thorough review of the OLG that is fully embraced by the government. One of the leading accounting firms in this country, KPMG, is brought on.

I have a question for Mr. Tory. He has said quite clearly that all retailers and clerks should be banned, absolutely banned—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Banned? No.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Oh, yes, he has, Mr. Dunlop. He has said that they should be banned from buying tickets.

The Ombudsman takes a look at this in the report. He calls that practice unfair and discriminatory. The only jurisdiction in the world that he could find that does this is Argentina. So Mr. Juan Perón Tory can explain why he's taking us down the road of Argentina when we have real leadership here in this House committed to the all-party legislative committee.

Mr. Tory: The minister asks if I'm outraged with respect to the fact that he and Dalton McGuinty have left the ticket-buying public, the customers of the lottery corporation, twisting in the wind while they waited around to get caught, which they did. You're darn right I'm outraged about that, and so are the people of Ontario. If the minister wants to know if I'm outraged about the fact that they have now yet again handed out \$700,000 of the taxpayers' money to supposedly have some guy quit or whatever it is he says has happened here, you're darn

right that I'm outraged about that, and so are the people of Ontario.

The question is about you and your accountability for this: Will you bring in here all of the documents, all of the memos, all of the letters between the lottery corporation and your office? Will you bring Mr. Brown's contract in here so we can all see, because if not, why are you hiding it? Why are you covering it up? Bring it in here. Table it tomorrow so we can all see. Otherwise, you're just trying to cover up for your own pathetic inaction.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Juan, you're on thin ice with the fake outrage; no one's buying it. The Ombudsman conducted a thorough review. The Ombudsman looked at all of the documents that he felt were appropriate, and I don't think that any member of this Legislature should second-guess the Ombudsman, an independent officer of this Legislature.

I accept the Ombudsman's report. Action to implement that report and the recommendations has been taken: 17 of the 60, and 25 more by the end of June, and the remaining 18 are in progress. The Ombudsman himself has commented and commended the government for the action that has taken place. Everybody understands, of course, the partisan nature of this Legislature, but I'll take the Ombudsman's word over Juan Perón Tory any day of the week.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock just for a moment.

I would like to bring the attention of the House to our guest in the Speaker's gallery: Gilles Morin, the member for Carleton East in the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th Parliaments and the Deputy Speaker here in the 35th Parliament and part of the 36th. Welcome, Monsieur Morin.

New question.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is again to the minister responsible for the Ontario lottery corporation. Minister, in the summer of 2006, on your watch, the Ontario lottery corporation spent over \$200,000 in court trying to silence Mr. Edmonds, trying to stop him from talking to the people of Ontario about how badly the corporation had treated him and about how he'd been defrauded out of money.

Minister, are you saying that the lottery corporation went ahead and engaged in that \$200,000 project of silencing Mr. Edmonds, a 78-year-old man who'd been defrauded, without informing you? Are you saying that you were sleeping through that and in the dark on that as well?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I can tell you, I've answered this question already. When

this matter was brought to the attention of the Ontario public by the Fifth Estate, the appropriate action was taken by the board and by myself. I have apologized to Mr. Edmonds here in this Legislature. I still feel that he was treated disrespectfully. I don't know what the original direction that Mr. Hudak, the member for Erie-Lincoln, minister at the time, gave to the corporation. I would hope that all members who have any relevant information about this would come forward. But I think most importantly, the action of this Legislative Assembly, this place, should be to put in place the changes that will make sure that we don't have additional cases where Ontarians are treated in this manner again.

I am confident, along with the Ombudsman, along with the board chair and the corporation, that we can and we will, in as quick a manner as possible, implement the recommendations of the Ombudsman and change the corporate culture so that this kind of incident does not happen again.

Mr. Hampton: This is not about the Fifth Estate. This is about the fact—and the auditor details it—that just before you became minister, as you became minister and during your two years as minister, innocent people in Ontario were being ripped off because of insider activities at the Ontario lottery corporation. It was leading to court cases, it was leading to out-of-court settlements, it was leading to the media filing freedom of information requests.

My question is, what were you doing? The Ombudsman tells us that a culture of "Simply collect the money and forget about protecting the public" was in place. But you were minister while all this was happening. Didn't you do what a reasonable person would do? Didn't you ask any questions? Didn't you feel a responsibility to protect the public, or were you merely collecting the money as well for the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I think, quite clearly, the Ombudsman has already rendered an opinion about the co-operation and about the action of myself as minister and of this government. The Ombudsman is an impartial officer of this Legislature and, of course, has some very strong views.

I see you have the Ombudsman's report in front of you. If you turn to page 68, you will read, as I did, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and the recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

The culture of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. was set when the New Democrats set up this corporation. We are taking the appropriate moves to split off the marketing and sales function from the oversight and regulatory function. My colleague the Minister of Government Services and I, along with the Ombudsman, are working to put the regime in place, which unfortunately you and your government did not when you set up this corporation.

All action will be taken to ensure that the public trust and confidence are maintained—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, our government's fourth budget that you delivered last week goes a long way toward expanding opportunity for the most vulnerable children in our society. I know I've been hearing loud and clear from constituents in my riding that investing in those who most need help is not only, as you have put it, "a moral imperative," it's also the right thing to do for our economy.

I was very proud, sitting here in this Legislature last week, to hear about how the government is making important strides on this front. Minister, please tell me and the other members here what our government is doing to help every Ontarian participate in our province's prosperity. How will that strengthen our economic advantage?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I want to thank my friend from London North Centre for the question and for the work she's done on this file.

The central theme of last week's budget was that Ontario is entering an era of new economic strength. One of the purposes of the budget was to ensure that that new economic strength is shared fairly with 13 million Ontarians. In particular, we made special emphasis through the new Ontario child benefit to direct additional support to 1.3 million children and 600,000 families that are living in poverty.

If I might, I simply want to quote the reaction of Gail Nyberg, who's the executive director of the Daily Bread Food Bank, where she says, "The Ontario child benefit will reduce barriers faced by families with children who are trying to leave welfare for work. At the same time, it will help reduce child poverty and hunger." I'm very proud of that.

Ms. Matthews: I'm sure all Ontarians understand the importance of investing in our families and in our kids. But, Minister, I've got many businesses in my riding as well, and they've been telling me for some time about the problem that exists with unfair business education tax rates in London. They've told me how these unfair taxes were impeding their ability to remain competitive. Please tell us what our government is doing to address this situation of unfair business education taxes.

1500

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Here's an area—not to get too political about it—where the previous administration really screwed it up, because they created a system of business education taxes which were different all over the province. My friend represents the people in London North Centre. For nine years, the city of London has had higher business education taxes than right across the way in Middlesex.

We're reforming that system. We are creating a new system of business education taxes over the course of seven years. We're reducing the burden by over half a billion dollars. We're creating a system with one rate:

1.6%. It will be fairer and create fair, competitive opportunities for businesses in every municipality right across Ontario.

ONTARIO LOTTERY
AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the minister responsible for the lottery corporation. The minister talked to the House earlier about the circumstances surrounding the departure of Duncan Brown, the chief executive officer.

The minister claimed that full disclosure was given about the departure, that the departure was reported on Friday at 6 p.m. on CTV. I believe you said that everything was handled in the proper manner: A news release was put out, and then the matter became public in the ordinary course. In fact, it was on the news at 6 o'clock that night—the usual time for a press release, of course. Friday night at 10:30 was when the news release was put out, after it had been on the news. The next day, it was reported by the Toronto Star that this decision was taken by your office on Wednesday and that you just didn't want it to come out until Monday.

I want to know this from you, and the people have the right to know this: Did you arrive at some agreement with Mr. Brown, have some discussions with him or with his representatives to have him leave this post on Wednesday or any time earlier than Friday? Why did it get on the news before the news release came out, and why did you try to cover it up until Monday?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I want to tell this member and all members of the House that I had no discussion with Duncan Brown, that in fact he and the board had a discussion on Friday, came to the determination that separation was in their mutual interests, and it was agreed to by both parties at that time. As I've indicated to the member, once that decision was taken, our office contacted the Ombudsman and a press release was issued to let the people of the province of Ontario know.

It's important to understand that the government is taking steps in order to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations to change the security measures and all of the other things, as we had undertaken to this House so many months ago. Those are the facts of the matter, and I'm happy to provide the information to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: If you're happy to provide the information to the Leader of the Opposition—and it's really the public who wants to know this. The public has the right to know, if they're going to be out buying the tickets and playing the games, that they've seen everything here, that all the details are on the table and there is nothing more to be investigated.

All we've asked you is this: for two simple sets of information to bring to the House. It shouldn't be hard to do. The first is memos, correspondence or briefing notes

between you and the board of the lottery corporation and people in your office concerning all of these matters; the second is a copy of Mr. Brown's contract, together with the accompanying correspondence concerning his separation. Will you undertake to bring those things to the House and table them so we don't have to go through the process of freedom of information, where we know you will stonewall and drag it out for as long as possible? Will you bring that information here and table it so that the public can see it—the people who buy the tickets—can see that your job is to protect and to uphold? Will you bring it here?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: This is a government which has had the standing committee on government agencies, chaired by your own member, provide oversight. This is a government which welcomed the Ombudsman coming and doing an investigation. This is a government which, through myself, directed the chair of the board to have an investigation, get to the bottom of this matter, and brought in KPMG.

I have, as I had mentioned earlier, spoken to provincial Auditor General Jim McCarter and asked whether or not he and his office would be agreeable or thought it would be appropriate to look into the matter at the OLG in light of the allegations which were raised. The Auditor General, Mr. McCarter, said that he felt it would be, in his words, overkill for him to get involved.

Notwithstanding that, in light of the Ombudsman's comments today, I have directed the OLG to turn over all files reviewed by the Ombudsman and any other relevant material to the Ontario Provincial Police. They will review the matter that was brought up by the Ombudsman and it is they who will determine and take—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): Minister, while people like Mr. Edmonds were being fraudulently ripped off and while other ticket owners may also have been taken the cleaners, the Ombudsman says, while you were doing nothing, “Rather than dealing head-on with the problem of retailer theft and fraud, the corporation opted to embark on a cosmetic makeover,” in the spring of 2006. This is while you were minister. The cosmetic makeover involved the expenditure of \$3.5 million.

Minister, can you explain how you did nothing and how the Ontario lottery corporation did nothing to stop this fraud, and in the meantime, you allowed them to go ahead and spend \$3.5 million on a cosmetic makeover?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: As I just said to the leader of the official opposition, I have instructed OLG to submit all of the files, all of the information that was reviewed by the Ombudsman to the Ontario Provincial Police. If this member has some information he feels is relevant to that investigation, I would encourage him to come forward and share with the Ontario Provincial Police whatever information he feels that he has.

I have every confidence in the OPP. I have every confidence in the Ombudsman. I think he has done a

thorough job. I think the recommendations in his report are fair and well-balanced, and that is why, on behalf of the government, I have embraced the recommendations. We have already taken steps to implement, in the case of both the Ombudsman's and KPMG's report, 17 of the recommendations, another 25 will be implemented by the end of June, and the other 18 are ongoing and we'll get to as quickly as we possibly can to make sure they come into force and effect.

Mr. Hampton: This is not about the Ombudsman. This is about the fact that you were asleep at the switch for two and a half years while these things were happening. The Ombudsman states in his report, “Prior to October 2006, there was an inappropriate ... culture within the OLG ... the OLG had become fixated on profit rather than public service.”

At the same time, this is what you said: “Ontario Lottery and Gaming has significant internal controls ... ‘internal control processes related to our lottery system are appropriate.’”

Minister, can you explain how for two and a half years you heard nothing, you saw nothing, you knew nothing, and it took the Ombudsman only 90 days to discover that innocent people were being ripped off, to the tune of millions of dollars, under your nose?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: If the member would care to continue with the Hansard quote, he would see that I clearly undertook to this House that all the appropriate steps, especially as recommended by the Ombudsman, would be taken to ensure that the public trust and confidence was maintained. Unfortunately Mr. Hampton left that part out. He also leaves out the part in the Ombudsman's report where he says, “I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change.”

The problem that the Ombudsman has suggested with the culture of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. was rooted in the fact that it was set up by New Democrats with this inherent flaw. We are separating that—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

1510

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister Sorbara, in Saturday's Hamilton Spectator city councillors complained that the city was not given enough funding support in the 2007 provincial budget.

As the member representing Hamilton West, I know that I and my colleagues represent my community very well, and we advocate all the time on behalf of Hamilton. In fact, you and I have had conversations leading up to the budget discussing Hamilton's needs. Minister, can you please shed some light on why Hamilton councillors might be under the impression that the city is not getting enough funding and what investments Hamilton is, in fact, receiving in this year's provincial budget?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I want to tell you frankly that the needs of Hamilton have been one of the things that have been right in the centre of my agenda, really, for the past three-and-a-half years. I think that's why we worked so hard and ultimately invested \$150 million to ensure that Hamilton would have a strong steel producer in Stelco.

In this budget, there are a number of things that I would point to for my friend from Hamilton centre. We're making a special allocation to the city of Hamilton to the tune of \$12 million because we understand the pressure that the city itself is in. In addition, we're providing \$2.1 billion in assistance to Ontario's poorest children. Much of that assistance will go to Hamilton. We're providing an additional \$8.6 million annually directly to the city of Hamilton to assist with housing. I could go on, and perhaps I will in the supplementary.

Ms. Marsales: Minister Sorbara, councillors in Hamilton have said in the media that they find it unfair that the province is gradually phasing out GTA pooling. I know that as the Minister of Finance it must be difficult putting together a budget and debating what decisions to make in the interests of the province. However, Minister, I'd like to ask what the province is doing to help Hamilton fund their social services, and also what thoughts went into ensuring that the city of Hamilton's unique situation would be addressed leading up to the budget last Thursday and how this government is working to ensure that Hamilton remains a strong member of the province's economy.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Just to say that in looking at measures that could specifically address the needs of the city of Hamilton, we did a couple of things. We reviewed with city officials their budgetary needs and, as a result of that, we provided an additional \$12 million in direct assistance.

In addition to that, we are in the midst of a comprehensive review of the delivery of social services, not just with Hamilton but with every municipality around the province through AMO and the city of Toronto.

As far as pooling is concerned, the reason why we eliminated pooling is because that represented an unfair burden on municipalities around the city of Toronto. We eliminated pooling simply to put those municipalities on the same footing as every other municipality across the province. That was the fair solution and that's why we opted for that.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question again is for the minister not responsible for the Ontario lottery corporation.

He has referred repeatedly today to a committee of this Legislature that is very capably indeed chaired by the member for York North. He has referred to that as the place where everybody could go and should have gone

and did go to have hearings with respect to the Ontario lottery corporation. Any question that we wanted to ask there, any information we wanted, should be made available there.

My question for him is this: Why, when that committee was meeting this fall to look into these very matters and to look into all kinds of allegations that were surfacing with respect to incompetence and mismanagement at the lottery corporation, did the Dalton McGuinty Liberal Party use its majority to shut down those hearings on the lottery corporation? When the member for Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford asked on November 29 for more time to get to the bottom of some of these matters, the members—Mr. Gravelle, Mr. Wilkinson, Ms. Smith, Mr. Parsons and Mr. Milloy—shut that debate down, cut it off, used the guillotine to bring down the debate on what we were trying to get to, which is the truth on these matters.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I can't speak to the committee deliberations, but I do know that the committee did have a thorough review, did have an opportunity to meet with Mr. Brown, the president and CEO, and Mr. Gough, the chair. The committee did issue its report to this Legislature containing several recommendations. In that report the PC caucus chair, Julia Munro, from York North, commended the OLG for its work and effort. We hear one thing from Mr. Tory today and one thing from his members another day.

I think any reasonable person would take the Ombudsman, an independent officer of this Legislature, at his word for the thorough investigation that he did, and KPMG, one of Canada's leading forensic auditing companies. In fact, I have engaged and talked to the Auditor General of the province of Ontario and invited and welcomed his opportunity to investigate any matter that he thought was relevant or pertinent. We couldn't be any more—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tory: The Liberals used their majority to cover up then and they're doing it today. The fact of the matter is, when this request was made for additional time on November 29—and I quote from the dissenting report to the committee's report, written by Mr. Tascona, the MPP for Barrie—Simcoe—Bradford, where he says, "The government majority on November 29, 2006 voted down a motion for the OLGC to re-attend the committee. The public has the right to have the operations of the OLGC stand up to public scrutiny in all respects and the committee must ensure that its report is based on the most current information."

This minister, this government, Dalton McGuinty, shut this down in a deliberate approach to make sure the public did not have information through a committee of this Legislature. We want to know why, and we want to know why you won't just stand in your place and agree to bring all of the documentation here, table it in this House, bring it back to that committee, bring Mr. Brown's contract so we can see just how badly you've

handled this entire fiasco. Why won't you just agree so the public can get their confidence back?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: In fact, additionally, I had the opportunity to appear before the estimates committee and I know that Mr. Hudak presented some very significant questions, presumably on behalf of the Conservative caucus, related to OLG. I was able to provide answers to Mr. Hudak's questions.

I've also mentioned, in light of the Ombudsman's comments at the press conference earlier today, that I have directed OLG to turn over all of its files reviewed by the Ombudsman and any other relevant information that the OPP could request for their review. I will be asking the OPP to review the matter raised by the Ombudsman and it is the OPP who will determine and take whatever steps are appropriate.

I have confidence in the Ontario Provincial Police. I find it curious that Mr. Tory does not. He's already expressed his lack of confidence in KPMG, his party's own auditor. But I want the people of Ontario to know that action has been taken and will be taken to maintain and restore the public trust and confidence. That is what—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora—Rainy River): To the minister, who was obviously asleep at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.: Here is the reality. For two and a half years, you sat there as the minister asleep while innocent Ontarians who were buying lottery tickets were being ripped off, while hospitals and charities in Ontario were being cheated, and you didn't ask any questions; you didn't want to know what was happening. Now, in this latest episode, you're going to pay the departed chief executive officer of the lottery and gaming corporation almost \$1 million to keep him silent.

Minister, what I want to know is, when in the McGuinty government does a minister like you, who should have been protecting the public, have the decency to resign because you weren't and aren't doing your job?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The Ombudsman in fact commends myself and the government for our openness and responsiveness. Unlike the member opposite, the Ombudsman is a non-partisan, unbiased officer of this Legislature. I have confidence in the Ombudsman and the work that he's done, which is why I have taken the action to ensure the implementation already of 17 of the recommendations; 25 of those recommendations between the Ombudsman and KPMG will be implemented by the end of June, and the other 18 have begun and are ongoing and will be implemented as quickly as possible.

Had this member had this much interest in Ontario Lottery and Gaming when they set up the fatal flaw contained within the organization, had he had this much passion, perhaps we wouldn't have reached this point. I am committed to fixing the mess, which was originally started by the New Democrats, together with my colleague the Minister of Government Services and the Ombudsman to make sure that Ontarians' trust and confidence is protected. That is paramount and that is what—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

1520

Mr. Hampton: Minister, this is about what you were doing for two-and-a-half years while innocent Ontarians were being defrauded out of millions of dollars, and we've already identified that you were doing nothing. You were simply a bump on a log collecting a minister's salary, asking no questions, demanding no accountability.

Here's the record of the McGuinty government: Tom Parkinson gets \$5 million of payola to depart and keep his mouth shut, not to embarrass the McGuinty government. Now we see this corruption uncovered at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. under your watch, while you were asleep. And what's going to happen? Well, the head of the corporation is going to get almost \$1 million of payola. Meanwhile you, as minister, stand there asleep, as you always have been, not knowing anything, not able to give any answers. Minister, when are you going to do the decent thing? When are you going to resign so the people of Ontario can—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I'm convinced, as is the Ombudsman, that with the appropriate seriousness and directedness, implementing these recommendations will restore the public trust and confidence in their corporation. I'm convinced that an unbiased, independent officer of this Legislature has done a thorough and sweeping and excellent report, a fair and balanced one, has pointed us in the right direction and given us a road map.

I have always dealt with this matter seriously. I've apologized to Mr. Edmonds for the past actions, regrettably, of the previous government. I'm committed to cleaning up the mess which was left by previous governments and to making sure that Ontarians have trust and confidence in their corporation. The Ombudsman concurs. He commends me and he commends the government for its openness and responsiveness to the report and recommendations, and for its immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change. Speaker, I agree with the Ombudsman.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, last Thursday my constituents were very pleased to hear our government's continuing commitment to helping our most vulnerable. Among the many increases in support outlined in budget 2007, we find a commitment to continually increasing the minimum wage in a way that respects the needs of businesses to remain competitive.

Between 2004 and 2007, our government increased the minimum wage four times in four years—17%. After nine long years of Tory neglect, absolutely not one penny did they raise the minimum wage. Our predecessors chose to ignore our lowest-income workers and instead advocated policies to create hardship on our fellow Ontarians during their hour of greatest need. By contrast, the McGuinty Liberals have shown and continue to show

a real compassion for our most vulnerable citizens. Minister, please explain—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

Hon. Steve Peters (Minister of Labour): I want to thank the member for his question. We are extremely proud, because for nine years we saw no increase in minimum wage. We moved forward with a balanced approach to increase the minimum wage over a four-year period, and that balanced approach that we set is the balanced approach that we're going to continue to take, because it was the right thing to do to raise that minimum wage. By 2010, we will see a \$10.25 minimum wage in this province, the highest in Canada.

Mr. Fonseca: Excellent. Thank you, Minister. The good news from budget 2007 doesn't stop. I'm pleased that our government will be increasing the minimum wage by a further 28% by 2010. Helping our low-income workers is the right thing to do.

But this is not the only way we're helping our most vulnerable. In addition, also announced in budget 2007, we will be enhancing WSIB for 155,000 injured workers and making further investments in affordable housing and in the new Ontario child benefit, which will help 1.3 million children annually.

In addition, your ministry will be receiving \$3.6 million in supplementary funding to help with the current backlog of employment standards claims. I know your ministry has done much, made great progress in improving enforcement in the Employment Standards Act. Minister, please share with us a few words about your further achievements.

Hon. Mr. Peters: I want to thank the member for his question, because unlike the Conservatives and the NDP, who abandoned injured workers in this province—the NDP created the Friedland formula, and the Tories put the enhanced Friedland formula in there and left our injured workers behind. Some 7.5%—more in three years than was given in 12 years by the Tories or the NDP. I'm proud of that. As well, when it comes to enforcement of employment standards in this province, the Tories and the NDP were not there enforcing the Employment Standards Act.

We've set in place a program to have targeted employment standards inspections in this province. We have done more in two years than was done [*inaudible*]. Because under the NDP and Tory governments, ESA prosecutions totalled approximately six per year. That's a total of 97 from 1990 to 2003. Since 2004, there have been over 1,000 prosecutions.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I

know many other people do, so to shorten the time, I'll read the first "whereas":

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need..."

There are a lot more "whereases," but I'll go to the "we, the undersigned":

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I've signed this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The member for Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): I have a petition to present:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature hereto.

1530

RECYCLING

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas waste from Ontario public schools that could otherwise be recyclable is contributing to increased landfill sites; and

"Whereas diverting waste is critical to sustaining a healthy environment now and in the future; and

"Whereas there is a need to encourage recycling initiatives in all schools; and

"Whereas the private member's bill proposed by the geography club from Georgetown District High School under Making the Grade will require all Ontario school boards to have two recycling bins in each classroom, one for paper and one for drinking containers. As well, cafeterias must have adequate recycling containers outlining items acceptable to be recycled;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the private member's bill that will amend the Ontario school boards education act to divert waste from Ontario high school classrooms and cafeterias."

These are signed by a couple of hundred high school students, and I affix my name to this petition as well.

SMITHS FALLS ECONOMY

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I have a petition regarding the situation in Smiths Falls. The "whereas" clauses outline that the Hershey plant is going to mean 500 people out of work. This, together with the Rideau Regional Centre closing, puts another 800-plus people out of work. For a town of 9,200, these 1,300 job losses are very serious.

They ask the Legislative Assembly to continue to work with Hershey to reverse the decision. They ask that immediate funding for infrastructure projects in Smiths Falls go ahead in order to attract industry. It asks that the four-laning of Highway 7 from Ottawa out to Carleton Place be accelerated in order to better provide transportation to Smiths Falls, and that the government consider postponing the announced closing date of the Rideau Regional Centre past 2009. They also ask that the government of Ontario create a fund equivalent to the northern Ontario heritage fund to attract investment to eastern Ontario. I've signed that.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have over 1,100 petitions here that are asking for the Ombudsman's oversight of children's aid societies, and they read as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Whereas Ontario is one of the few provinces that does not have independent oversight of child welfare administration; and

"Whereas eight provinces now have independent oversight of child welfare issues, including child protection; and

"Whereas all provincial Ombudsmen first identified child protection as a priority issue in 1986 and still Ontario does not allow the Ombudsman to investigate people's complaints about children's aid societies' decisions; and

"Whereas people wronged by CAS decisions concerning placement, access, custody or care are not allowed to appeal those decisions to the Ontario Ombudsman's office;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we support the Ombudsman having the power to probe decisions and investigate complaints concerning the province's children's aid societies (CAS)."

Of course I agree with this petition. I have signed it and, on behalf of over 1,100 residents of this province, I submit these petitions to the Legislature.

REGULATION OF ZOOS

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): "Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly

"Regulate Zoos to Protect Animals and Communities

"Whereas Ontario has the weakest zoo laws in the country; and

"Whereas existing zoo regulations are vague, unenforceable and only apply to native wildlife; and

"Whereas there are no mandatory standards to ensure adequate care and housing for zoo animals or the health and safety of animals, zoo staff, the visiting public or neighbouring communities; and

"Whereas several people have been injured by captive wildlife and zoo escapes are frequent in Ontario; and

"Whereas these same regulatory gaps were affirmed recently by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in his annual report;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP David Zimmer's bill, the Regulation of Zoos Act."

I will also affix my signature to that petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I have this petition signed by hundreds of people from the Leacock Care Centre in Orillia.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of

care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I'm pleased to sign that in support.

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I'm reading a petition on behalf of Paul Cochrane, chair of self-advocates of Community Living, and also on behalf of so many who are served by Community Living Toronto.

"Whereas the Ontario disability support program is designed to meet the unique needs of people with disabilities who are in financial need or who want and are able to work and need support; and

"Whereas it is appreciated that the McGuinty government increased the maximum monthly rates for ODSP by 3% in 2004 and a further 2% in 2006;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to increase the Ontario disability support program payments on an annual basis to ensure it covers the cost-of-living increase incurred by ODSP recipients."

I support the petition and I'm signing it.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I have a petition that has been presented to me by the Anglican diocese of Toronto.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 122,000 households across Ontario are now "on waiting lists for affordable housing...;

"Whereas housing affordability problems are worsening in Ontario...;

"Whereas Ontario's current social housing stock is increasingly rundown, with tenants forced to endure degrading conditions...; and

"Whereas the cost of ignoring the plight of our poorly housed and homeless neighbours affects all citizens of Ontario...;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

"To ensure there is a major allocation of funding for affordable and supportive housing" flowing out of the 2007 "budget, with a commitment to release this funding quickly; and

"To urge the government of Ontario to reassume financial responsibility for the cost and repair of the ... social housing stock which was downloaded onto municipalities who cannot afford" their "repair and upkeep costs."

This was signed by 1,018 Anglicans in the diocese of Toronto.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of Paul Taylor and others. It reads as follows:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I would remind members as well that there is a meeting this Tuesday night, tomorrow, 7 p.m. until 9 p.m., on mental health at the Legends complex in Oshawa. I'm pleased to support this on behalf of Nola Mitchell and many others.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): "We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a" paid "capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

As I am in full support, I affix my name.

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless

long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs....; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services ... are being put at risk....; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes....; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes....;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

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LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to do with the Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare community lab service. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) wish to maintain current community lab services; and

"Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

"Whereas the funding for community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of MAHC; and

"Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with the growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas the operating budget for MAHC needs to reflect the growing demand for services in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community lab services."

I support this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to read a petition on behalf of the citizens of the riding of Durham, which reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless

long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I'm surprised this was not in the budget, but I will sign the petition on behalf of my constituents.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Today, in question period—I'll defer this until tomorrow.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2007 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 22, 2007, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): It is indeed my pleasure once again this year to join in this debate and to express on behalf of the official opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party and my colleagues, but also, I think, on behalf of the people of Ontario, our profound disappointment at the overall thrust of this budget and as much as what it did not contain as what it did.

You know, if you look at the budget—and I learned this in business; I think families would go through the same thing—the one place where the rubber really hits the road is when you sit down and decide how you're going to allocate the resources that you have. So when a family sits down at the dinner table and has a discussion

about how much they're going to allocate for perhaps a new car if we have the money this year, and how much we might be able to put aside for a vacation, can we take one at all or not, that's one of the most important meetings they will have over the course of a year, because it really forces them to set priorities for that family. It forces them to make decisions. It forces them to indicate what's really important and, by definition, what's not.

I think the same is true in a business; the same is true in a government. So I really think when you want to take a look at what a government cares about, what a government doesn't care about, whether the government is actually delivering for people, the best place to look is probably in the budget. I think when you look at this budget you can see—I'm going to talk positively about one thing that's there, although, again, with some qualifications. You always have to with this group because they're known as record-setters when it comes to not keeping their promises. I guess if I had to start anywhere, and I'll say it with—

Interjection.

Mr. Tory: No, no, no. I wanted to start positive; I really, really did. The Minister of Finance has now come in and I thank him for being here. I wanted to start positive and I wanted to say this: The Progressive Conservative Party and myself as leader support the attention that was paid in terms of at least the sentiment that lies behind the need to do something to address the circumstances in which, in particular, children in working families in Ontario find themselves. We would agree with what has been said; namely, that there are far too many—in fact, one is too many—children living in poverty or in severely disadvantaged circumstances in this province.

At first blush—and this is the part where I have to qualify the support a little bit—the child benefit introduced in the budget looks like something that will take some positive steps. We're still trying to analyze the interrelationship between the measures undertaken by Mr. Flaherty in his budget federally and this one. And we certainly have some concerns with respect to the timing of this, in the sense that if the problem is as urgent as I believe we all believe that it is, then it certainly seems, especially in light of some of the minister's projections with regard to his fiscal circumstances, that it's taking an awfully long time for this benefit to be fully provided to the children of Ontario who find themselves, through no fault of their own, in these circumstances.

It's interesting to me that when it moves the government, as a result of the electoral timetable, to have a down payment available of this child benefit on July 1, undoubtedly with some flowing letter from the minister or the Premier taking personal credit for this use of the taxpayers' money, they can move heaven and earth to get that sort of thing done. Yet in example after example after example we've seen before, whether it's getting money out the door or not, as the case may be, to farmers, whether it's getting money out the door to almost anybody else, it sometimes takes years for any-

body to get any money. So in this case, I would point out that it seems to be taking an awfully long time, and I'll come back to this because one of the real features of this budget—I think it might well have been called the back-end-loaded budget because everything in it pretty much is severely back-end loaded; in fact, going out as far as 2014, which is after the election after this one. So we've now got, I think, a new record being set here, not for long-term planning. I wish there was any hint of long-term planning in this budget at all, that it maybe had a transit plan that went out 10 years with the money or had a plan for the municipalities that went out 10 years with the money. But what we have here is that any time anything good is going to be done to help children in poverty, to help the municipalities and so on, it seems to take years and years and years. Yet when it's something that suits the government's political purposes, there will be something done on virtually an instantaneous basis.

But I will say that the sentiments expressed—and I'd like to hope that when we've finished examining all the details and had a chance to question the ministers and really get to the bottom of how this is going to work, we will be able to be supportive of this. The way the system works, of course, I'm sure this is buried inside one overall piece of budget legislation, and so with all of the different things that we find that are falling short in this budget, it may well be that we will not be able to vote separately for this. But if it's brought in as a separate piece of legislation, we want to take a serious look at it and we would like to be in a position to support this because I think it is the right thing for the province to do.

Aside from some of the things I've already mentioned, which is the back-end-loaded budget and the fact that there really is no long-term plan set out at all, I'd like to start from the premise that something is going on here that I think is deeply troubling to a lot of people in the province of Ontario, and that is that they see their province slipping in front of their eyes.

I don't think the minister intended this when he went off to read to the students on the day before the budget, when he chose the book *The Little Engine That Could*. That is a great story of determination by the little guy and so forth and so on, but the fact of the matter is, I don't think the people in this province have historically seen their province this way and I don't think they want to see their province this way. I think they yearn for a day when we can re-establish this province with the strength and tradition of leadership that it has had over the years.

I'm speaking not of any particular political party. I'm not even speaking of any particular government in this province. I am talking about days not too far gone by, when this province was not the little engine that could; it was the big engine that did. This province was the economic engine of Canada. It was the province that the other provinces looked to for economic leadership, for educational leadership, for health care leadership, for government administration leadership and so on. We were looked to as the example. In fact, there were many instances in which people came from around the world

and across the United States to see what Ontario was doing.

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But in particular, the slippage that has taken place—and really, if you look, if you want to get into what happened, the fact of the matter is that during the previous Progressive Conservative government—I believe my numbers are virtually correct—the average rate of economic growth during that period of time I think was 3.6%. During the time of the current Dalton McGuinty government, the same number has been something—a full point and more below that. Not only is that costing jobs to the people of the province of Ontario—we'll get to that too—but it is costing the government huge sums of money that are not available for public purposes because Mr. McGuinty has allowed this province to slip further and further behind.

When was the last time the people of the province of Ontario read a report written by the Royal Bank of Canada indicating not that Ontario was third, not that we were second, not that we were fifth, but that we were dead last in Canada in economic growth—more than half a point of economic growth behind Prince Edward Island? This is not me making up a number because I'm the Leader of the Opposition. This is the Royal Bank of Canada indicating Ontario was dead last under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty—dead last.

I don't make up the numbers that suggest that 30,000 people left Ontario to go to Alberta last year—30,000 people left Ontario to go to Alberta. In fact, there was such an out-migration from this province that had there not been immigration coming to Ontario from outside the country, the population of Ontario actually would have gone down. That's not the kind of thing people are used to in this province. They're used to Ontario being a magnet for people from the rest of the country to come here because they thought we had good government, we had a strong economy, we had a dynamic economy, we had an environment that was conducive to the creation of jobs and to risk-taking. But in fact, that is no more under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty—or should I say the lack of leadership of Dalton McGuinty. Now, why is that? Well, I think it starts with the fact that there is no plan. There is no plan. I will come back to the things that were not in this budget, because there were not many things in this budget that we all know, and the people of Ontario know, are urgently needed—urgently needed in order to get this province back on track and get it back to being the big engine that can and the big engine that does.

There is no plan, and it really just fits in with the rest of what has gone on. We have highlighted to the public, we have highlighted to the media, and I'm here today to highlight to the Legislature, and through the Legislature to the people of Ontario, the fact that what we have seen here is an explosion of spending without results on the part of Dalton McGuinty. Dalton McGuinty is spending \$22.4 billion more of the taxpayers' money today than was the case when he took office in 2003. That number

in and of itself doesn't necessarily mean very much. It means something within the context of what you get for the money that was spent. If people had got a lot for the money that was spent and there were lot of results to show for it, then they might say, "Well, it still seems like an awful lot of money," especially when it's financed on the backs of taxpayers who are struggling to keep up. But at the end of the day, the really disconcerting part of all this is that the government of Ontario under Dalton McGuinty has spent \$22.4 billion in additional monies without achieving any significant results at all.

You would have thought, for the appropriate share of \$22.4 billion, that we would have emergency rooms in the hospitals—

Interjection.

Mr. Tory: I'm sorry, the minister is just unable to contain himself, Mr. Speaker.

You would have thought that you would have some results in the emergency rooms of our hospitals, for example, that for the share of the \$22.4 billion that went to those emergency rooms, those things would be operating better for now. Yet we can come in here, and I meet people weekend after day after night who tell me stories.

One that I raised in the Legislature a short time ago: Mr. Katz from Thornhill, Ontario, wrote to me and said he had taken his wife to the North York General Hospital emergency late one evening for an emergency situation related to her being a cancer patient receiving chemotherapy. He says, "We had to wait about nine hours, to the early morning, to have a doctor see her and provide a diagnosis. This wait time was agonizing for my wife, who was ill at the time." What kind of results is this for \$22.4 billion of additional government spending?

When I was at the waiting room not too long ago in Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital in Burlington, they said they were running at about seven to eight hours average waiting time, when in fact the benchmark accepted by the Dalton McGuinty government is four hours. What kind of result is that for the share of \$22.4 billion in additional government spending?

Mr. Katz then goes on to say in his own e-mail, unrelated to his wife's terrible hardship in the emergency room, that he himself found out a couple of days later that he had to see an ophthalmologist. This was in October 2006. He was told that his appointment would be in August 2007. So he was told by his doctor that he needed to see an ophthalmologist, and after the expenditure of \$22.4 billion of the taxpayers' money, he's told the best he can do to get an appointment to see that doctor is almost a year.

How about Judy Brown of Woodstock? She tore the ligaments in her knees 15 months ago. She was told that she would have to wait six months to see a specialist about her torn ligaments. She then wrote to the government and they referred her all over the place—the usual rigmarole they give you. She was told that she would have to wait and wait and wait because the operation that she needed to have—namely, to fix ligaments—was not a priority surgery. She was going to wait

months and months in pain and discomfort, having had this accident befall her. So you have to ask yourself, when it came to Ms. Brown from Woodstock, what was the share of the \$22.4 billion that was of any help to her in her hour of need for some health care in this province?

I was at the Peel Memorial Hospital one day in the fall of last year. On the day I was there, the average wait time in that emergency room in one of Canada's fastest-growing cities was 12 hours. There were 25 people in the emergency room on stretchers, people who had been admitted to the hospital and were lying in the hallways in undignified circumstances, not receiving the proper care. Ambulance crews were sitting in a waiting room and waiting around because they couldn't hand the patients over to the hospital, since the emergency room itself was in chaos because there were no beds upstairs for the people who had been admitted. Where were the results from the \$22.4 billion in additional spending when it came to those times, those people waiting in that emergency room and the chaos we saw going on there? So on the emergency rooms, you would say, well, there are no results there to speak of. There's still chaos, there are still reports being written, and people are still coming in to tell us about the horrors they are experiencing in emergency rooms.

How about gridlock? We do have the typical one-time, one-off one project: one press conference, one show-business, glitzy project which is going to do, I'm sure, a little bit of good. I'm sure it will. But the fact of the matter is—and I should be fair. It wasn't just the one project; it was one that was a bit larger, namely the York University-York region subway, but there were also the Mississauga and Brampton projects at the time. But we sit here in the fourth year of the mandate, at the 11th hour, when they are about to be experiencing, as they have been, these deathbed repentances, and notwithstanding that they are on their deathbed now—they are in their agonizing final days where they're about to be turfed out by the people; their contract is about to expire—the fact of the matter is that we have, in response to the expenditure of \$22.4 billion of the taxpayers' money, not a shred of an integrated, funded long-term transportation plan for the GTA and for southern Ontario. We have a little project here and a bigger project there, all one-off, all very mysteriously picked out of the air for reasons best known to the minister, and no plan.

In fact, we have an agency set up, and they have managed to hire some people. They appointed a very good chairperson; I will say that. It had its first meeting last week. They promised it in three or four budgets in a row; I think it was three, to be fair. Finally, after the third time it was promised, in last year's budget, we got the agency set up. It just shows you how high a priority gridlock and the grief experienced by people living in the GTA are not for the Dalton McGuinty government. The fact is, they promised it in three consecutive budgets. Now we have the agency. It has no real mandate, no money and no teeth to get anything done; but they have at least managed to have their first meeting coincident

with the deathbed repentance of Dalton McGuinty and his government as they're about to be turfed out of office. So for \$22.4 billion, the people sitting in their cars and having trains they can't take because they don't exist, buses that don't exist and transit systems that are starved for money, and no funding formula that has been restored—notwithstanding this budget, they are seeing nothing for them.

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Then we come to the area of municipal finance. The words of the mayors and the chairman of AMO speak better than I could about this, because they're the people who really are in a position of complete objectivity on this. But what we've seen there, again, is the same old story: Let's sprinkle a little bit of money around and let's do some of the last-minute shove-it-out-the-door unconditional grants to people and hope we can keep them all happy, and hope by kind of saying, "Over here, look at this unconditional money I'm giving you," they'll ignore the fact that over there, they've done nothing to fix a problem that Dalton McGuinty ranted and raved about before the 2003 election. Downloading, and the subject of downloading, and the hardship this imposed on hard-working property taxpayers and municipalities in Ontario, couldn't have occupied more time in his speeches, yet what has he done with the \$22.4 billion to address and to fix that problem? The answer is, next to nothing. Don't take it from me. Let's start with councillor Sam Merulla from Hamilton. He describes the budget—

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Don't go there, John.

Mr. Tory: I clearly have hit some sort of sensitive spot with the Minister of Finance. I don't know whether we need to get him medical aid or not. You might want to get some medical aid, Mr. Speaker. He's clearly shouting and turning red, and I'm not sure what is going on here.

Here is what Councillor Sam Merulla said. He just said, in describing the budget, "It's a slap in the face to Hamilton." Now, we haven't seen the members from Hamilton up on their feet saying, "This is an outrage, the way Hamilton was treated." Hamilton, which represents a great opportunity in this province—there is land to be developed there, there are jobs to be had there, there's industry to be attracted, there are condominiums and housing to be built, yet what we get here from Dalton McGuinty is "a slap in the face to Hamilton"—not my words; the words of a member of the Hamilton council.

But it gets better. It gets better. Let's go to the mayor of North Bay. He was even more concise in his review of the Minister of Finance's budget. Mayor Vic Fedeli, North Bay Nugget, March 23rd, 2007, said, "We got skunked." There is a community where they have completely left them out in the cold. They've left them out in the cold—millions of dollars of unfair mistreatment to the people of North Bay who are now, thanks to Dalton McGuinty, going to face massive increases in their property taxes or huge cutbacks in their provincial services because of decisions deliberately and calculatedly made by Dalton McGuinty.

Now, let's not stop there. Why don't we go to London, Ontario, where Deputy Mayor Tom Gosnell, the budget chief of London, says, "That"—meaning the welfare increases—"is going to be downloaded to us and that's what we were hoping would be uploaded." So he is commenting on the fact that the very thing they hoped might be the subject of some relief they were given as part of the \$22.4 billion in spending without results from Dalton McGuinty was in fact something else that is going to increase their costs over the next period of time.

So maybe you sort of say, "Well, it wasn't the day for the municipalities."

Interjection.

Mr. Tory: Oh, I have more here. I really should; there is more. These are so good, you know. Here, this is a good one. Carolyn Parrish, the well-known former Liberal MP, now a city of Mississauga councillor—these are her words; I want to be very clear on this: "I hate being an ungrateful wench, but come on," she said, "I think the team will still be running candidates. There needs to be a promise to speed that up," meaning to get on with the task of taking some of this \$22.4 billion and producing just a small element of fairness for people who are paying their taxes and who would expect their government to actually be addressing some of these problems.

So you know, you're not going to find anything for the municipalities, because they've been shafted and left out of this \$22.4-billion spending spree. But maybe we could find something if we turned to talk for just a moment about the farmers and the rural municipalities. Of course, we find there the news is equally bleak, unfortunately. The farmers have faced cutback after cutback after ignorance after slap in the face from the Dalton McGuinty government. The Dalton McGuinty government has demonstrated over and over and over again that it doesn't care about farmers. It doesn't care at all. I think that frankly, if they all just went away and stopped doing business, and everybody just folded up the family farms and that was it, they would think that was just fine. It's evidenced by the fact that again this government can spend \$22.4 billion more in spending between 2003 and today and we see a cutback—a cutback—in spending in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. How do you explain that? Everybody else is just wallowing in all kinds of additional spending, most of which unfortunately, I'd have to say, is not producing any results. But the poor old farmers—not only is there nothing new for them, there's not even the stuff they were able to rely on before, not even a hint in this budget of a long-term plan. But I will come back to that.

So if you look at what was their share of the \$22.4 billion in additional spending by Mr. McGuinty and his government—and by the way, just so people can understand that number or perhaps factor it in a different way, that's \$4,500 for every single family in Ontario that has been spent by way of additional government spending without results by Dalton McGuinty since he took office. On an hourly basis, Dalton McGuinty has increased

spending by \$750,000 every hour. You know, I think there might be people out there who would say, "I don't have any objection to that," if they saw they were getting any value for money. If they saw the emergency rooms were actually working a bit, if they saw that maybe there was a plan for transportation which had been partly funded, if they saw that there was anything good going on—I mean, look at the class caps. This is a policy that was headed in the right direction in terms of having, for the lower grades, smaller classes. But only Dalton McGuinty and his crowd could spend more than the total amount of money that they estimated in their election platform it would cost to achieve the lowering of the class sizes for kindergarten to grade 3—they spent more than the total sum of money, than they said it would cost in total, and only got half the job done for more than the total amount of money. That's the way these guys operate. That's why we spent \$22.4 billion more in taxpayers' money, \$4,500 for every single household watching out there, \$750,000 an hour, and when it comes to class sizes they've spent way more than they said they would spend to get the whole job done and only got half the job done. Where I come from, that's called managerial incompetence. It's called managerial incompetence. It's called, perhaps, trying to bamboozle the public into thinking maybe that that number was unrealistic to begin with; I don't know. But the bottom line is it's the hallmark of the Dalton McGuinty administration: Get half the job done for twice the money. That's the hallmark. That's what they call value for taxpayers' money: Get half the job done for twice the money.

That is why I think Ontario is slipping: There is no plan. I mean, you have to ask yourself, was there any hint anywhere in this budget of a plan for any part of our industries? How about the tourism industry: was there a plan there? No, there was some kind of half-baked reference to something to do with the rebates and so forth—pretty small potatoes. They've got a great ad campaign. And when I say "great," it's great in the sense that it doesn't really tell anybody where to go or what to do when they get there or how to spend their money, but it's nice pictures. I'm sure it was incredibly expensive and it won't help any operators, I don't think, in this province in terms of specifically directing business to their establishments. But having said that, they can muster up a lot of ad campaigns and a lot of brochures, but is there a strategy for tourism? The answer is no, there's not. Is there a strategy for the agricultural sector? No, there's not. Again, there are a couple of odds and sods in there, but there is no strategy for the agricultural sector. There is no plan for the future.

The reason Ontario had a leadership role in the past and wasn't slipping the way it is today under Dalton McGuinty is that Ontario had leadership. Ontario had leaders who were prepared to get up and put plans in front of people that were long-term plans that lasted beyond the date of the next election, plans that had dates and times and places and money, plans where they actually worked with the federal government to look at

the long view and put some things in place that could be done that would bolster the economy of the province and help make Ontario stronger. In fact, what we see here is virtually nothing, virtually nothing by way of even a hint of a plan. I mean, there is not even anything to cause you to say, "You know, I think if we asked a couple of questions in the House, something might come out." Because they're not interested in planning. They're interested in governing in an ad hoc fashion, day to day. Look at everything they've done for the municipalities. Everything they've done is a one-off, ad hoc, one-time, one-year kind of program.

I know from the experience I've had and, frankly, the Minister of Finance knows better too—the Premier doesn't; I don't think he has run a two-car parade before, but the Minister of Finance has run businesses before—that if you are dealing with a situation where everything that you get in terms of money that you're expecting from your partner—and the government of Ontario is a partner for lots of businesses and other governments and so on—if everything you get is coming at the last minute or you don't know that it's coming at all, you're uncertain as to whether it's coming, you are not in a position where you can plan properly. You are having to make decisions at the last minute, you are having to make decisions in a hurry, you are having to make plans without knowing whether you can carry them.

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That has been the hallmark of the Dalton McGuinty government: one-off ad hocery, whether it's quick fixes for the farmers, where you hope you can buy a little peace by sending them a bit of money—and believe me, it has been a bit, representing a cutback; whether it's one-off transit projects where you do one project but there's no plan for the long term; or whether it's a one-off for the municipalities where you send them a little bit of money for infrastructure and kind of hope it keeps them quiet until the election is over.

So if you combine "no plan" with "no leadership" with "huge spending without results," that is why you end up in a situation where people do not have the confidence today to make the investments, to take the risks in this province. They are talking with their feet and with their money. They are leaving Ontario. We've lost 120,000 manufacturing jobs. There are other people with great skills and abilities who are leaving this province—30,000 who have gone to Alberta. We have other people who are deciding not to come here. I know that the minister's colleague the Minister of Economic Development has heard the stories, because I have too, and you know they're true: of people who looked at Ontario and said, "I can't really rely on that government. They don't have any rules or programs or anything else in place that seem to last for more than a couple of days' press clippings and then they change their mind or change the rules or change the funding or withdraw the one-off stuff." It just is something that has discouraged people from investing here and discouraged them from making a bet on Ontario, and that in turn has allowed us to slip.

I think it's interesting to look—we've talked a little about the \$22.4 billion in additional spending—at what is not in the budget. These are all—I've got seven of them here that I want to talk about—in my view, very serious omissions. The first is any semblance of a jobs plan. There's nothing you could even cobble together on your most charitable day. I'm fond of my friend the Minister of Finance over there. I wish I could take—I was going to say "a liberal interpretation"—a charitable interpretation of the words in the budget and say that I worked really hard at it and I found two sentences you can actually connect together that represent some semblance of a jobs plan for all those people who are unemployed in this province and who've lost those manufacturing jobs, who are in those towns in the north and the east and are struggling, whose houses are worth less, the shop owners who are struggling because people in town have less money to spend, and so on it goes. In fact, there is nothing—there is nothing. Even my most charitable interpretation doesn't find those two sentences you could cobble together and say that it represents a jobs plan.

Was there anything here, on the part of the government of Ontario and the Minister of Finance and Dalton McGuinty, to match, for example, the initiatives undertaken by the federal Minister of Finance to help spur manufacturing and investment, which everybody knows needs to be done in order to make Ontario more competitive and stop that slippage that's taking place? Did the minister stand up and say, "I'm going to match what has been done by the federal government and make that happen so that industries in this province would have a powerful incentive over the next two years"—I believe it is—"to invest in new plant and equipment"? The answer is no.

What did we get from Dalton McGuinty as opposed to what could have been done to really make the federal initiative in this area a powerful tool for economic growth and to attract investment? We got a manufacturers' council. I think that's going to be a great encouragement to people in London and Smiths Falls and Cornwall and St. Thomas and Oakville and all kinds of places in between and up north who have lost their jobs. I'm sure they're going to take heart. I'm sure they sat in front of the television and watched Dalton McGuinty announce the manufacturers' council and said, "Hallelujah; my salvation has arrived in the form of the manufacturers' council." The best they could probably hope for is that they might be able to find out when that manufacturers' council is having one of its meetings in one of those expensive hotels on which the Dalton McGuinty government spent millions of dollars last year and maybe they could go by and get one of the leftover sandwiches from the meetings, because that's all the manufacturers' council is going to do for those hundreds of thousands of people who have either directly or indirectly been affected by the loss of their jobs in this province.

I think it is a disgrace—nothing less than a disgrace—when we can come in with a budget which says at the end of it that it has, I believe, a \$300-million to \$400-

million surplus and that there was absolutely no room found for any kind of a jobs plan, there was no room found to match the initiative undertaken by the federal government specifically to assist manufacturing in Ontario and elsewhere in the country.

What about the tax changes? Somehow the minister had the spirit move him to say—and I agree with this—that we should be speeding up the capital tax elimination. But he announced last year that if he thought we could do this, if circumstances permitted or whatever the language was, we might speed it up to be done by 2010. The fact of the matter is that he also was saying three or four months ago that he was going to bring in a deficit at that time, I believe, of \$1.8 billion. Here we are in 2007, and there is no reason whatsoever why the minister wouldn't have had the financial flexibility to do a lot more of what he did in a teeny, tiny little step last year, which was to accelerate that elimination if he had chosen to do so and send not only the message to people that, "You are going to pay a lower rate on that job-killing tax that kills investment and discourages investment in new plant and equipment," but send the signal as well that, "We are determined to get Ontario back on track, determined to get you to make those investments now or to do everything we can possibly afford to do to get you to make that investment now, that we care about the health and welfare of manufacturing and other business in the province of Ontario."

In fact what we have is simply a restatement of last year's announcement: "Don't worry. Three more years from now, you'll get some relief." This again is unacceptable. It's unacceptable. We have people hurting in this province, people who badly need to make those investments just to protect the jobs that we still have in Ontario. When the Minister of Finance and Dalton McGuinty had the money to do it, they gave the back of their hand to Ontario manufacturers and said, "We'll see you in 2010," two years after the election, and even then we all know that anything they say running up to an election campaign is not to be believed in any event.

What about—

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: John, it is in the legislation.

Mr. Tory: The Minister of Finance is losing control again. I don't know what is the matter with him. He has clearly taken some excess of caffeine this afternoon. But the bottom line is, he says it's in the legislation, and we all know that this government, the Dalton McGuinty government, would not hesitate to use its majority to ram shut debate on the lottery corporation, to ram through human rights legislation changes or to ram through a change to the capital tax if it suited them to break another promise. To them, breaking promises is just water off a duck's back. They'd pass a piece of legislation in the blink of an eye to break a promise if it suited them. That's what they're all about. They think their word means nothing. Dalton McGuinty is a Premier in this province who has established clearly that he believes his word means nothing when in fact his word means everything to businesses who are looking to invest in this

province and to have the confidence of knowing that they will be able to do business in a place where their government is a reliable and supportive partner.

There's no mention of any decentralization plan or anything at all that the government itself might do through its own operations to help these towns that are struggling across the province: more evidence of no jobs plan whatsoever. The jobs plan is just not there.

The manufacturers' council: lots of good meetings in fancy hotel rooms, probably good food, but that will only be good for the people who belong to the council, who undoubtedly will be great supporters of the governing party, at least for the next few months, until that thing is wound up and those people are sent back to whatever they were doing before.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Are you going to eliminate it?

Mr. Tory: No, I am not.

The efficiency plan—the non-existent efficiency plan, because we are talking here about things that aren't in the budget: I have raised this, and I'm sure it is a source of great amusement to the Minister of Finance, and the fact that I have raised it just really proves in some respects how dismissive the Dalton McGuinty government is of, I think, legitimate concerns raised by the opposition, the media and others. But the government has been claiming now in its fourth consecutive budget that it had what I consider to be a fairly limp four-year cumulative target of finding \$750 million in savings. The first year, they set out the target. The second year, they said they were a certain number of dollars along. The third year, interestingly enough—last year—they were at exactly the same number of dollars in savings they had found as they were the year before, meaning they found zero in one whole year in government. Now this year they have magically leaped to the level of \$800 million in claimed savings they have found.

The bottom line is, I have asked 10 times at least, probably 25 times outside of this House, "Let's have the list of the savings that have been identified." There has never been a list published, and that is because there isn't a list. There is no list of savings that have been achieved by this government, because they are so awash in waste and profligacy and extravagant spending and boondoggles and ad campaigns and logo changes and office space and so on, they are so awash in this and up to their neck in waste and just pathetic mismanagement, that they don't possibly have a list that indicates anything they've done that's any good when it comes to this stuff.

I don't have the list here, but I've got it pretty much committed to memory. But I really do want to refer to a few things.

One of the great quotes of all time—here's a great one from none other than Dalton McGuinty, from May 5, 2003: "Our government will use consultants only when absolutely necessary and when there is nobody in the public service to do that work." I think it would be appropriate to look at just one ministry of the government, for example, and see what they've been up to, carrying through on the word of their powerful, strong leader,

Dalton McGuinty, who is committed to better management and only using consultants when absolutely necessary.

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Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care consultants, 2004-05: 2004, \$17.8 million; 2005, \$29.1 million in consultants. "We will use consultants only when absolutely necessary," said Dalton McGuinty. There you have it: from \$17 million to \$29 million in one year. The communications branch of the Ministry of Education, 2002-03, when the PC government was in office: \$2.746 million. In 2005-06, with Dalton McGuinty using consultants when only absolutely necessary: \$4.4 million. How about the \$5.5 million they spent in the health department on furniture? That's in addition to the \$1.5 million they spent on hotel rooms. It goes on and on. It is a complete, total disgrace.

The \$6 million for the logo change of the lottery corporation: You know what? I said at the time when it came out that it's the tip of the iceberg. When you see that stuff going on in corporations, when you see that kind of decision being made to mismanage, mispend and waste money on frivolous projects, that's when you know it's the tip of the iceberg you're seeing. Sure enough, the chickens have come home to roost today and a long time before today. What we don't know is how much the government is still covering up of what's going on in this \$6-billion corporation.

This is—it's the best example of all, I suppose, in terms of one shining example sitting right there of mismanagement—a \$100-million scandal. Let's make sure we understand that's what this is: The lottery corporation scandal is a \$100-million scandal on Dalton McGuinty's watch. That's what's involved here. It's a \$6-billion corporation where they had a minister and a board of directors who just thought they could sleep through the meetings. Anything could go on on their watch. People could be running around doing all kinds of crazy things and no one cared.

There's no efficiency plan. We've had no list on the claimed \$800 million, which I expect is a complete figment of the minister's imagination.

How about long-term care? We know for a fact—and I've learned about this as I've toured dozens and dozens of hospitals. The reason we have ambulances lined up in front of the hospitals, crews idle sitting in waiting rooms and patients lying on stretchers in the hallways is because the emergency rooms are jammed up. And we know the emergency rooms are jammed up because there are many people in there who had been admitted to the hospital who can't get a room upstairs.

I was at the Kingston General Hospital a couple of weeks ago. On the day I was there, there were 10 people who had been admitted to the hospital who were lying in the emergency room, and two of them who had been there for 10 days. They're there for 10 days in excruciating and inadequate circumstances because there are no beds upstairs. I'm going from memory now, but I think on the day I was at the Kingston General Hospital, either

25 or 30 beds upstairs in that hospital on that day were occupied by people who belonged in long-term care and who needed a long-term-care space. The problem was that there was a waiting list—I'm going from memory again—of about 125 people waiting for a long-term-care bed.

What do we get in Dalton McGuinty's budget for people in need of long-term care? For those who don't have a space, we get exactly nothing—nothing. We get a reannouncement of the same 1,700 spaces—that is, by the way, contrasted with the 20,000 spaces funded by the previous government—that I think they've announced about 411 times over the last two years, and we get some help on the nursing side that, according to the long-term-care association, amounts to 50 cents per resident per day, which the long-term-care association people, I believe, have said amounts to one minute of extra care for people who are presently in long-term care. So there you have it: a budget that decides its commitment to the senior citizens of this province, to any sense of planning for the future in terms of those who will get elderly and need that care going forward, let alone the hundreds who need it today, is a reannouncement of some old spaces that haven't been done yet and that they've reannounced 100 times over, no new capital, and 50 cents per resident per day for additional care. We all know about the broken promise there, where I believe they committed to have thousands of dollars—

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): Six thousand per resident.

Mr. Tory: —\$6,000 per resident in additional care: a massive broken promise. It's not as big in monetary terms as the health care tax that was brought in by Dalton McGuinty, but in terms of the betrayal of our distinguished and most needy senior citizens, that is probably a bigger betrayal because of who this is done to and how they have completely gone back on their own word with respect to the seniors of this province.

What else was not in the budget? Well, there was certainly no real long-term protection plan for homeowners vis-à-vis assessment. You know, the minister got up and he was so proud of himself.

By the way, I left out a good quote, and I wouldn't want to let it not get on the record. It was about the lack of a jobs plan. It was from the Windsor Star, which normally has been known to parrot whatever the government of the day might have told it. It certainly has not been known to say anything favourable to Conservative causes most of the time. Here's what they said about the budget and jobs, and I quote: "This budget wasn't about Windsor or Essex county. It wasn't about reviving the flagging manufacturing or automotive industries. It wasn't about lowering taxes or creating jobs." That's the Windsor Star. I think they're coming around. They're making an awful lot of sense nowadays. Having said that, that's just what they had to say about the budget, and you know what, Mr. Speaker? They're right.

Now, no real protection plan for homeowners: The minister can try and dress up this dog any way he wants,

but this dog will not hunt. This is not a real plan to protect homeowners. The fact of the matter is, if you see the magnitude of increases taking place on an annual basis—let's pick a round number of 10%, because that would not be an unfair number to pick for many people across this province over the last number of years. If you assume that the average was 10% per year and that under the minister's new scheme they're going to do it every four years, that will be 40%. All that's going to happen is, they are still going to get a 40% increase in their assessment, they're just going to get it averaged over four years, so they still take it in the neck.

As I said—and it was the right thing to say on the day the budget was announced—all they're giving people the time to do is they are giving them four years to pack up their bags when these senior citizens and other people lose their homes, as opposed to a real protection plan put forward by the Progressive Conservative Party that says you will face a maximum increase of 5% per year each and every year as long as you and your spouse own your home. That is real protection for people that will stop this kind of thing from happening that the minister is going to allow to go on ad infinitum.

On top of that, he didn't say a word about what I think is an evil that is in this system, an evil that says that it's up to the taxpayer to prove the government wrong in this, as opposed to it being up to the government to prove itself right. It is not right that this bloated, arbitrary, incompetent organization, MPAC, that was found to be all of those things and more by the Ombudsman—

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): That's your baby, John.

Mr. Tory: The Minister of Tourism just can't help himself. They've been in government for four—he still thinks he's in the opposition. You know what? He's soon going to get his wish, because he will be again. He loves being in opposition. He forgets the fact that Dalton McGuinty and his government have been in office for four years now. Anything they wanted to do with MPAC, they could have done, but the fact of the matter is, just like the lottery corporation, just like the children's aid society, they wait to get caught. They wait until somebody exposes them. In all three of those cases—children's aid, MPAC, the lottery corporation—it was the Ombudsman, on behalf of the people, who worked to expose these people, and only then did they act. They had three years to do something about MPAC if they thought there was anything wrong with it. They did absolutely nothing except to say, "Go on and keep shafting people, keep acting arbitrarily, keep doing whatever you want to them. We don't care. It's out of our hands."

Mr. Speaker, don't take it from me about what they think of the minister's lack of a plan to protect homeowners. Let's listen to what Bob Topp of the Coalition After Property Tax Reform had to say.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: He doesn't believe in market value assessment.

Mr. Tory: Yes, well, anybody who disagrees with the minister and his schemes is somebody who's a non-believer in democracy and truth.

But having said that, here's what Mr. Topp had to say in referring to the minister's non-plan to protect homeowners: "I don't think it really does the job. It makes taxes, in the short run, more predictable for homeowners but it doesn't deal with the volatility which is the fundamental problem with any market-based system."

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We don't alter the fundamental principle that the value itself will be based on market value, but we do put a cap on that reasonably protects homeowners and gives them a degree of certainty and reliability, especially the senior citizens of Ontario, who want and who need that protection. Frankly, when you combine what the minister did not do in long-term care and what he did not do in other areas for senior citizens with this flagrant disregard for the senior citizens and the homeowners of Ontario, you should be ashamed and Dalton McGuinty should be ashamed that you turned your back in this way on the senior citizens of this province.

Rural Ontario and farmers: Well, the numbers here tell a disastrous tale of neglect and a complete overlooking of the rural municipalities and the farmers. Dalton McGuinty said in the election campaign in 2003 that he would make the Ministry of Agriculture and Food a lead ministry in the government—a lead ministry. In fact, we're now budgeting this year for \$191 million less than in 2006-07—\$191 million less. The numbers are right in the minister's own budget. In fact, if you go all the way back to 2004 and 2005, the planned spending is half a billion dollars less than in 2004-05. No long-term plan for the farmers whatsoever, nothing there for them in that regard, total ignorance of the tobacco farmers' call for an exit strategy and to try to piggyback on some of the efforts being made by the federal government. By the way, another broken promise by Dalton McGuinty.

Then we get to two other things that are more general by way of comment. One of them is a complete lack of any sense of urgency on the part of the government for any of these matters that are addressed, or not addressed, as the case may be, in their budget. First of all, if you look at program after program after program, they're pretty well all back-end loaded. That means two things. It means, number one, perhaps most importantly—in fact, for sure most importantly—the people who are supposedly going to get the help, or who need the help if we think they need it, are not going to get it for a long, long time. I reiterate what I said about the child benefit: This has the makings of a good idea. Subject to seeing the detail, it has the makings of a good idea, but it's not going to be fully implemented for years to come—for years to come—at a time when the Minister of Finance himself projects very substantial surpluses for his own government.

The second reason for people to be worried about this back-end loading is because they would have reason to question anything that Dalton McGuinty says in any

document, including, unfortunately, I say with regret, the budget of the province of Ontario. Mr. McGuinty, through his budgets, through his election platforms, through his speeches, has proven himself a person who cannot be believed. No matter what he says, you can't believe him. He is the world record holder. I had a whole list—and it will be in my amendment to the motion—of the major broken promises. I didn't want to trespass on the House's time in terms of moving my amendment to give the full list, but you'll see, even with the smallest list of the major broken promises, that this is a world record.

There has never been a democratically elected government, probably in the history of the world, that has broken as many promises as Dalton McGuinty has, as blatantly and as complete a betrayal of the trust of the voters. So that's why we see the back-end loading as being something that's evil. But more than anything else, aside from the fact that it doesn't get the help to people and it doesn't really bear believing because it's Dalton McGuinty, after all, doing the talking here, really it just betrays a lack of urgency on the part of this government about these problems, all the things we went through that are missing: no jobs plan, no sense of urgency about people who are unemployed or who might be threatened with losing their jobs, no efficiency plan, no concern for the taxpayers—I'll come back to them in a minute—no long-term-care plan. No sense of urgency about that because, after all, it's just people waiting in waiting rooms, people lying in hospital beds who shouldn't be, people who are not getting proper home care.

No real protection for homeowners. Well, after all, it's only the property taxpayers. They can take it in the neck year after year, courtesy of Dalton McGuinty. Who cares? No help for rural Ontario and farmers: They can take another cutback; no problem at all. You know, they're just farmers after all. And so it just goes on and on and on.

But I think the most important thing that I want to mention that's an omission from this budget is any hint, any small token, any indication whatsoever that Dalton McGuinty cares a whiff about the average hard-working taxpayer in Ontario who goes to work every day, does his or her job, pays his or her taxes, plays by the rules, comes home, tries to raise and support their family in a responsible manner and, when it comes to a government that has managed to find \$22.4 billion to spend without results, has managed to come up with numbers that indicate they have a \$300-million-plus surplus this year, growing to some bigger number this year, growing in the year after that to an excess of \$1 billion and, with the reserve, perhaps \$2 billion, there wasn't even the slightest indication that Dalton McGuinty cared enough about those average taxpayers to say, "I will give you an acknowledgment of your hard work. I will give you an acknowledgment of the fact that you are the people who fuel the \$22.4 billion and all the rest of the spending, that you are the people, through your hard work, who make it possible for the government of Ontario to finance health care, education, roads and everything else." There wasn't

even the slightest indication that this government understands how hard-pressed those taxpayers are at the moment to make ends meet for themselves and for their families. There wasn't even the slightest indication that it is, after all, their money that Mr. McGuinty is taking in and spending in such a carefree fashion on logos and lawyers and all manner of things. There wasn't the slightest indication that maybe it would be good for the economy and good for those families if those people were able to actually have some of their own money back.

So if you really look at it for a moment, that's in some respects the most glaring thing that might have at least caused the taxpayers to say, "These people get it. They know how hard I work for that money. They know how much I want to see them try to find value for money," which Mr. McGuinty has been so pathetic in doing as a Premier of this province. They know that we need to have a jobs plan and an efficiency plan and a long-term-care plan and a home ownership protection plan and a plan for farmers and a plan for tourism and so forth. They know money has to be spent on those things, but at the same time they wonder how it is that so much spending could be done, and so much could be left out of the budget of things that might have helped them.

It would have helped these people to have a jobs plan because it's their kids and themselves, in some cases, who are losing their jobs. It would have helped them because it's their parents, in some cases, who are the ones waiting in the hospital beds for a long-term-care position to open up. It would have helped these people because some of them are farmers who are paying their taxes and would have said, "It's bad enough you don't have a program for us. It's bad enough you don't support us in our hour of need. But if you just gave us the slightest indication you care about the hardship that we're going through by saying, in the presence of admitted, huge surpluses that you're going to accumulate, that you could have given us back a tiny bit of the money that you took from us illegally and immorally in a tax that you said you would never bring in—Mr. McGuinty, why couldn't you have done that?" The fact is, there is no good answer to that question.

There is no good answer to that question, other than, I think, some comments we saw from the Premier last Friday which may get a little bit to the root of the way he thinks. He said last week when asked, not by me but by a journalist, "Why couldn't you have given back"—I think the journalist suggested \$100—"to every person who is paying the health tax?" which includes, by the way—I'm sure I'm right in saying this; the minister will correct me, I'm sure, if I'm wrong—some of the very people who will get the child benefit. I believe I'm right that the health tax kicks in at \$20,000, and people start to pay something at that stage.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Five dollars, John.

Mr. Tory: Pardon me?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Five dollars.

Mr. Tory: Well, fine, then. Why don't you give them back \$5 of the health tax? You gave them absolutely

nothing, because you don't believe in giving the taxpayers back any of their own money, because you are disrespectful of the taxpayers, because the fact that you broke a fundamental election promise not to raise taxes doesn't matter to you, because Dalton McGuinty's word doesn't matter to him when it comes to promises he makes to the people of Ontario.

We will do it differently. Our budget would have contained a jobs plan, because it's the least you can do when you've lost 120,000 jobs. We would have put into effect in this budget, if we'd been the government, a real protection plan for homeowners. We would not have turned our back on an option to cut down on those waiting lists for people waiting in pain to get their knee replacements done when it can be done at public expense, paid for with the OHIP card, by someone in the private sector. We would have said, "Better to get those people off the waiting list, get them the care they need at what is suggested to be a lower cost than the community hospitals can do it for, anyway." We would have embraced that kind of option to provide people with the care that they need.

And in this budget, in the presence of the kinds of numbers that the Minister of Finance himself and Dalton McGuinty put forward, showing billions of dollars in surpluses coming up in the next couple of years—not the next decade; the next couple of years—we would have begun the process of doing away with this health tax, giving the people back some of their own money, because the fact of the matter is, this government can afford it.

I'm assuming, in laying out all their spending projections for the next number of years and showing a substantial surplus, they have put it clearly on the record that they could begin the task of phasing out this health care tax. They could have begun it this year; in fact, it's possible, had they not gone on that irresponsible spending spree last year, they could have begun it last year and given the people some relief they need and started to dig themselves out from underneath the terrible pall that that health tax has cast on the integrity of government and politics in this province and on the integrity of the Premier of this province himself.

1640

I'm going to move an amendment to the motion moved by the minister the other day. But to conclude, I want to just say this: Ontario didn't get to be great by accident. It didn't happen automatically. If you read this budget, this kind of collection of little things here and there that is done with no semblance of a plan, with all kinds of areas, all kinds of things that I've gone through in my remarks today that have been left out—if you go through that, you will see that there's no semblance of a plan here. And when you see Ontario leaders who have been successful, they were real leaders. They had real plans with real objectives and real measurements and real results for spending that was actually done. This government has proven itself incapable of having a real plan. They started off with the best plan, I guess, that they

could come up with in 2003, and that lies today in a shambles. So maybe the reason they haven't come up with another plan is because their first plan ended up being such a self-serving, cynical fiasco of promises that in many cases could never be kept or that they never had any intention of keeping, either of which is an indictment of their integrity and of the integrity of the Premier of this province.

But at the end of day, Ontario didn't get to be prosperous by accident. It got to be prosperous through careful planning, good management and addressing the priorities that needed to be addressed. The very fact there's no long-term-care plan set forward—which, I admit, does involve an expenditure of money, but you are making that expenditure to look after people well but also to save money so you don't have people lying in acute beds at two to three times the cost per day. This is a fundamental concept that I know the Minister of Finance understands—the Premier doesn't because he hasn't really run things before, but Mr. Sorbara does—and that is that sometimes you have to invest money in order to get a return. I think the return on an investment made in long-term care would have been something that would have come fairly quickly; in fact, it would have come very quickly and addressed some very urgent needs of some very vulnerable people. Past governments of all stripes, frankly, from time to time, have recognized this because they had real leadership. They had people who understood that you have to lead. You have to plan, you have to manage properly, you have to lead and you have to actually make some decisions. You can't just do these one-off, ad hoc things and hope it'll tide them over for a while and keep them all quiet and buy a few votes in the meantime.

I do not accept any concept, as is accepted by Dalton McGuinty and this government, of a little Ontario. They have been prepared on their watch to see Ontario diminished. They've seen us slip down the list slowly but surely, pretty well every list you look at, whether it's our commitment to R&D, whether it is our economic growth—any one of the lists that you want to look at. Things are going down the list for Ontario. We are slipping.

We used to be not a little engine that had to struggle to make it over the top of the hill; we were the people that were on the top of the hill trying to figure out how we would stay there, how we would stay in a position of leadership, how we could make sure that we could always look our children in the eye and say to them that we are doing the planning, we are doing the work, we are managing in such a way, we are showing the necessary competence, foresight, determination and discipline that we can look you, our children and even our grandchildren, in the eye and say, "The opportunities you will enjoy and experience in this province will be better than the ones we have experienced." I think there are a great many parents and grandparents out there today in Ontario who would not be able to look their grandchildren and their children in the eye and say, under the leadership of

Dalton McGuinty and this kind of hodgepodge lack of a plan, lack of accountability, lack of results for money spent and so on, that we are going to be able to build the kind of Ontario that we've always been able to be so proud of and that we knew was a leader in Canada—was the leader in Canada—that we knew that we had the plan and the leadership to maintain that kind of leadership position in Canada.

I think that when people look back on this period, they're going to see it as a period of extreme disappointment, where the leadership of this province let the people down, whether they're farmers or residents of small towns or seniors or people who are using the health care system or students or people who are in jobs trying to work in the economy. Their government has let them down because there are no plans for the future, and I've tried to catalogue that today. Read the budget: There are no plans. There is a series of isolated incidents, but no plans.

There is no aspirational statement here talking about how we have to get back to where we were. There's not even really an acknowledgment of the fact that we've slipped. Sometimes the first step on the road to getting back in the game and getting Ontario back to where it needs to be is to acknowledge that we have slipped and to decide together we're going to do something about that to make this province great again, to have some great goals. That is going to be the mandate that is going to lie in front of this party when it comes to office after the election in October of this year because we understand what it's like to manage, we understand what it is like to have a plan, we understand what it is like to have discipline.

I have lived those experiences. My whole career is about that. It is about having deadlines, having plans, having goals, having objectives against which you are measured, having to demonstrate to people that you believe in the concept of value for money, actually believing in enterprise enough to say that we've got to create the environment here that is conducive to enterprise, that is welcoming, that says Ontario isn't just a place on the list to invest but is back to the top of the list of places to invest in Canada, where people want to come and create jobs and are not fleeing this province in record numbers taking their jobs with them.

So I would move that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on March 22, 2007, "that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government," be amended by deleting the words following the words "that this House" and adding thereto the following:

"recognize that the budgetary policy put forward by the Minister of Finance continues the McGuinty government's legacy of broken promises and demands more and more from taxpayers while delivering less and less, and that this House condemns the McGuinty government for:

"Saying anything and paying anything that they think will get them elected;

"Increasing spending by more than \$20 billion since coming to office—an increase of \$750,000 every hour

they've been in office—and having no results to show for it;

"Increasing spending by more than \$20 billion since coming to office and still failing to keep a huge number of campaign commitments including, but not limited to:

—"the broken promise to not raise taxes;

—"the broken promise to close coal-fired electricity plants by 2007;

—"the broken promise to balance the budget every year;

—"the broken promise to not add to the waste of taxpayers' dollars;

—"the broken promise to provide children with autism the support and treatment they need;

—"the broken promise to stop school closings;

—"the broken promise to ensure 75% of students meet or exceed the provincial standard on province-wide tests within their first mandate;

—"the broken promise to implement a hard cap of 20 students for early grades;

—"the broken promise to provide a new funding formula for rural and northern schools;

—"the broken promise to cap hydro rates at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour until 2006;

—"the broken promise to make the Ministry of Agriculture a lead ministry;

—"the broken promise to eliminate barriers to foreign-trained professionals within one year;

—"the broken promise to spend \$6,000 more per year for individuals in long-term care;

—"the broken promise to unclog emergency rooms;

—"the broken promise to divert 60% of municipal solid waste by 2005;

—"the broken promise to roll back tolls on Highway 407;

—"the broken promise to build 20,000 new affordable housing units;

—"the broken promise to create tens of thousands of new child care spaces; and

—"the broken promise to tackle gridlock.

"Continuing this governments ad hoc, one-off approach to funding key priorities, including a \$50-million last-minute handout to Magna when less than 24 hours later it was announced they were part of \$4.7-billion bid to purchase DaimlerChrysler;

"Referring to tax relief as nothing but 'trinkets and baubles' for hard-working Ontario taxpayers, yet maintaining the government's long-standing practice of rushing money out the door at fiscal year-end to fund pet projects;

"Failing to provide tax relief to middle-class Ontarians despite manufactured deficits and massive spending increases over and above what was contained in their 2003 election platform;

"Overseeing the loss of more than 120,000 manufacturing jobs in the province and failing to respond to a motion passed in this House calling for a comprehensive jobs strategy; and

"Failing to provide the strong leadership to make the important decisions that will deliver results to the people of Ontario.

"Therefore, the government has lost the confidence of this House."

The Speaker: Mr. Tory has moved that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on March 22, 2007, "that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government," be amended by deleting the words following the words "that this House" and adding thereto the following:

"recognize that the budgetary policy put forward by the Minister of Finance continues the McGuinty government's legacy of broken promises and demands more and more from taxpayers while delivering less and less, and that this House condemns the McGuinty government for:

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"Overseeing the loss of more than 120,000 manufacturing jobs in the province and failing to respond to a motion passed in this House calling for a comprehensive jobs strategy; and

"Failing to provide the strong leadership to make the important decisions that will deliver results to the people of Ontario.

"Therefore, the government has lost the confidence of this House."

Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Mr. Speaker, I would move adjournment of this debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The House adjourned at 1653.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 26 March 2007

Lundi 26 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 mars 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HEALTH SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DU SYSTÈME DE SANTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 21, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 171, An Act to improve health systems by amending or repealing various enactments and enacting certain Acts / *Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à améliorer les systèmes de santé en modifiant ou en abrogeant divers textes de loi et en édictant certaines lois.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): On the last occasion of this debate the government member had the floor, but I do not see him here. Further debate?

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): I am pleased to join the debate on Bill 171. It's a huge bill. It's the Health System Improvements Act. It was introduced by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care just before Christmas, on December 12, 2006. It is an omnibus bill. It is a bill that actually seeks to amend 42 separate acts. I think we've heard it said that this particular bill, which seeks to amend 42 different acts, has the potential to involve the largest number of stakeholders ever on any bill. If you take a look at all of the different health colleges, I think you can see there are a lot of people that could possibly be impacted by this bill.

Many of the initiatives contained in this bill are issues that have been talked about for some time. They are now coming forward, and some people would say that they're long overdue. However, they are moving forward at this time.

I want to take a look at the bill. I am going to go through some of the schedules of the bill. I would tell you, though, right off the bat, this is not a bill that really is, I guess, one that the public is going to speak to or probably have a lot of interest in, although the bill does impact them because of the impact it has on the different health professional groups in the province of Ontario. It's quite a technical bill. As I review the bill, I think you'll see that it is a bill that is quite technical. Certainly, if there are concerns that are expressed about parts of the bill, you will see that usually the concerns are coming

from the different colleges that are going to be impacted by the legislation. It is not a bill where the public is stepping up to the plate because the public probably doesn't quite understand at this point in time the impact the bill might or might not have upon them.

I would like to begin with schedule A. This is one that doesn't deal with the colleges, but it would facilitate—and I say that because, remember, this is an omnibus bill. It's a bill that deals with a lot of different issues under the health umbrella. It's not necessarily just restricted to the HPRAC recommendations for the colleges. However, that does take up the bulk of the bill. Schedule A would facilitate the implementation of a new integrated air and land ambulance system to manage the transfer of patients between health care facilities.

Dr. Chris Mazza, the CEO of Ornge, describes the benefit of integrating land and air ambulance critical transfers under his organization. He says, in a very positive way, it "would result in a more coordinated, faster and safer transport service. Patients would receive better and safer care while in transit because they would be accompanied by critical care paramedics who have the training and skills necessary to care for critically ill patients." So again, that particular change is being well received.

1850

I would just remind those who are watching that while we were in government, we did take a look at this whole issue of ambulance services, trying to reduce the wait times for Ontarians during emergencies. We actually made a major investment of over \$224 million for ambulance services. In fact, from 1999 to 2003, our party increased funding for air ambulance services from \$46.8 million to \$72.7 million. I know that our party certainly can take some pride in what we have done in helping to create a world-renowned air and land ambulance service. I would say to you from my own personal experience as a former Minister of Health and Long-Term Care that this particular service is staffed by dedicated, highly trained professionals and I have full confidence that this recommendation, which I support, this newly rebranded ambulance service, will continue to deliver the high-calibre care to our sickest patients in the province of Ontario. That's a very positive move and I think we have to acknowledge and recognize that, and we have to recognize that the people who work with the air and land ambulance are dedicated professionals who have a tremendous amount of professional expertise, compassion and do provide outstanding care for the residents in this province.

Taking a look at schedule B, it would actually enhance the services that optometrists, dental hygienists and pharmacy technicians, interns, provide. We talk a lot at the present time about expanding the scope of service for health professionals. This schedule B is here because of recommendations that have been published by the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council, more commonly referred to as HPRAC, over the years. If you're not in health, you don't know what HPRAC is, but it's a very important body for the health colleges.

For the benefit of the people here in the House tonight and watching, I want to read a few opinions and comments from the stakeholders that are affected by schedule B. Miss Penny White, the president of the Ontario Dental Hygienists' Association, said, "It has taken a long time to get our issue on the government's agenda, and we are pleased that the government is fulfilling this commitment to act on HPRAC's recommendations to increase access to dental hygiene services." I would just hasten to add that a similar recommendation had been made by one of our members, Jim Flaherty. He had a private member's bill on this issue. Finally, this issue is moving forward.

Now, the optometrists: Dr. Derek MacDonald, the president of the Ontario Association of Optometrists, is saying here that they're pleased with the commitment that the government has shown to improve access to primary eye health care services.

If you take a look at schedule B, it is going to allow for an expansion in the scope of practice of health professionals and it's putting the interests of Ontarians first; it's going to allow the public to have more choice. These are recommendations that are coming from HPRAC; they are the ones who are making these recommendations to enhance these health services. They are intended to help reduce some of the pressure on the health system, which we all know today is overburdened and, many would say, underfunded. For example, we know that today in the province of Ontario, if you take a look at the number of family doctors, there are over one million people who do not have a family doctor. That was why our government introduced primary care reform, we set up the primary health teams, the family health networks. They have become today the family health teams. But it allows for a multi-disciplinary approach to improving access to health services. So, we have schedule A, we have schedule B and, again, they are of benefit to people in the province of Ontario.

I'd like to look now at schedule D. It proposes the transfer of legislative responsibility of five categories of non-residential and seasonal residential drinking water systems from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Unfortunately, as in many pieces of legislation that are introduced by the McGuinty government, we don't have much information regarding this particular proposal. There's not much detail at all, so it would be premature to take a look at what all of the implications might be. However, I would say to you that I have questions, and I know that the Ontario Public Health Association also has questions,

regarding schedule D, which, as I've just said, is the transfer of the legislative responsibility of five categories of non-residential and seasonal residential drinking water systems from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Some of the concerns that I have that are shared by the Ontario Public Health Association are: We'd all like to know if there's going to be adequate funding, if there's going to be laboratory and technical support, and if there are going to be clear regulation standards related to the construction and operation of small water systems. Is the Ministry of Health, who will now have the responsibility, going to be providing that funding, that support and those standards?

I think all of us in this House, particularly those who served during the time of the Walkerton issue, know that safe drinking water is an issue that always needs to be first and foremost on our minds. This particular schedule, this particular initiative, schedule D—what we need to know from the government—and I see the Minister of Health here this evening—we look forward to receiving further details on some of the issues that I've outlined just a moment ago to ensure that, indeed, we're going to have the adequate funding, we're going to have the laboratory and technical support and we're going to have clear regulation standards related to the construction and operation of the small water systems. Again, that's what the Ontario Public Health Association wants to know as well. We have to make sure—I think we've all learned from Walkerton—that we need to get this right the first time. We just have to make sure that the appropriate level of financial support is going to be there.

I'd like to turn to schedule G. Schedule G deals with an issue that actually has been of concern and interest not just only to the public but certainly all the doctors in the province of Ontario. It is in regard to the recommendations from Justice Peter Cory. In April 2005, former Supreme Court Justice Peter Cory called for sweeping changes to the existing Ontario medical audit system.

When he introduced those changes in April 2005, the Minister of Health said that he would respond to Justice Cory's report by the summer of 2006. Regrettably, the McGuinty government was not able to achieve that timeline. We have not seen any action for more than 18 months. We do have to make sure that we put in place a system that, obviously, is going to be fair to the health professionals but also respond to the needs of the public. This was motivated, if we remember, by a situation in 2003. The judge did agree with the criticisms of the system, saying that the system, which resulted in about 100 audits a year out of 22,000 physicians, had "a debilitating and, in some cases, devastating impact on doctors."

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Hon. George Smitherman (Deputy Premier, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Now we have more.

Mrs. Witmer: The minister has just said to me that we have more physicians today than that number, but I would hasten to remind the minister that Ontario is no

longer the jurisdiction of choice for physicians. The OMA recently came out with some numbers indicating that for the first time in recent history, this province lost doctors to other provinces in Canada; in fact, we lost 14. I would also remind the Liberal government that the number of underserved areas in the province today is larger than the number we had, and I would also remind the members of the government that there are over one million people without a family doctor today.

Getting back to Judge Cory's recommendations:

"Physician groups are telling us that Judge Cory's recommendations would not only make the system fairer, but would protect the \$6 billion spent on doctors' fees from fraud or abuse.

"Physicians have heard that delays in implementing the report are due to civil servants" who, according to them, have tried "to water down the recommendations," and this, so Douglas Mark of the Ontario Coalition of Family Physicians says, is so that "the same kangaroo courts will occur."

But he says that doctors are not going to "stand for that....

"There will be a huge outrage. This has been the biggest thing to unify doctors in the last 20 or 30 years.... The whole thing was completely draconian. It really was a witch hunt."

Tom Blackwell, in the *National Post* on October 23, 2006, says, "Official Warns of MD Fraud: Doctors Support Bill. Ontario Auditing System Overhaul Could Make Fraud Harder to Fight." So you can see that people have different opinions.

My job as the critic for the official opposition is to make sure that all of the viewpoints that are being expressed by stakeholders in the province of Ontario to the greatest degree possible are put on the public record. I think, at the end of the day, the government needs to know what the concerns are that are being expressed. The reason you introduce any bill for debate is that hopefully you will listen to what the opposition has to say, you hope that they will listen to what the stakeholders are saying, and you hope at the end of the day that the bill is going to be in the best interests not only of the stakeholders but, obviously, the public who are going to be impacted. That's why we're elected. That's why we live in a democracy. That's why we don't live in a dictatorship.

I would only say to you that the Ontario Medical Association did request that the Liberal government move quickly to implement the recommendations set out in Justice Cory's report. Unfortunately, the Minister of Health has not followed through, and we haven't seen the movement that might have been asked for.

I want to go back and speak briefly, because there's another group that actually has some input on schedule G, and this is a group called the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association. So you can see that there are people outside of the health stakeholders who have an interest. I just want to tell you what they said:

"The schedule G amendments to the medical audit process in the Health Insurance Act are grossly inadequate. These amendments, drafted by ministry staff at OHIP, are not faithful to the recommendations of Justice Peter Cory. Ministry staff were responsible for the unfair processes of the previous audit system. They should not have been allowed to draft the legislation. Most notably, they have not included a provision in the amendments stipulating that OHIP bears the burden of proving its cases in any audit hearing and requiring that OHIP and others involved in the administration of the audit system comply with principles of fairness and civility.

They go on to say that, "There are many other recommendations of Justice Cory which have not been incorporated. While the old audit system (which involved the medical review committee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario) has been abolished, other audit committees (chiropractors, etc.) continue, despite the fact that the Attorney General has acknowledged that the process is legally flawed."

This group, the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association, say that the proposed amendments are confusing and lack the clarity which was the hallmark of the report of Justice Cory. They say that this portion of the bill should be scrapped and the preparation of proper legislation should be delegated to others who have read and accept the report of Justice Cory. So you can see there are those who are for, there are those who are against, and there are those who are neutral regarding schedule G.

Schedule K of this legislation proposes the creation of an arm's-length public health agency. The new agency is to be named the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. The legislation suggests this agency would attempt to enhance the protection and promotion of the health of Ontarians through providing scientific and technical advice and support to those working to protect the health of Ontarians. As well, this agency would carry out and support activities such as public health, research, surveillance, epidemiology, planning and evaluation.

We have heard many experts over the past few years who have said to us there is a need for such an agency. In fact, it was our government that commissioned the review which first recommended establishing such an agency. I would have to say that although our party agrees that there is a need for an agency of health protection and promotion, again, we have a piece of legislation—as is so common when the McGuinty Liberals introduce legislation, there's just no detail. There is no plan for implementation.

Not only has the Minister of Health failed to indicate the cost associated with such an agency, but stakeholders, such as the former Supreme Court Justice Archie Campbell, have indicated that an arm's-length agency—and I quote—"fails to take into account the major SARS problem of divided authority and accountability."

If we go to the SARS commission's final report, called *Spring of Fear*, on pages 1161 to 1162, Supreme Court Justice Campbell points out that an important lesson from

SARS is that the last thing Ontario needs in planning for the next outbreak—and we all know it's going to happen; the question that remains is when. The last thing Ontario needs in planning for the next outbreak and to deal with it when it happens is another major independent player on the block.

The SARS commission actually recommended a much different arrangement in its first interim report. They warned very strongly against creating another autonomous body, when I think the SARS experience has demonstrated to all of us the dangers of such uncoordinated entities.

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So I would ask the government, I would ask the Premier, to explain to us, which they haven't done thus far, why the government is going to be establishing an arm's-length agency when the commission under Justice Archie Campbell has said that we should not establish another autonomous body, simply because of what happened under SARS, when we had this lack of coordination between different entities. Considering the importance that such an agency would have in protecting the public from another SARS-like outbreak, I think we need to make sure that this particular recommendation, which stands in conflict with the recommendations coming from the SARS commission—we need to make sure why the government has selected this route and not followed through on the recommendations from Justice Campbell.

I think the other thing we need to clearly understand is not only why they have selected this autonomous entity, but also what this independent body is going to cost the taxpayers in the province of Ontario. Again, this government is very, very fond of making announcements, but we don't ever see a plan of implementation, we don't see timelines, we don't see a financial commitment.

A good case in point is the hospital in Cambridge. I'll tell you, this government has played with the people in the city of Cambridge. The city of Cambridge is ready to go. They have an old hospital. They need to see expansion. They have a growing community. This government took them off the list, first of all, and said, "You're not going to get any money for capital renewal and expansion." Then they said, "Oh, yes, we're going to allow you to move forward, but you'll have to use your own money first." Guess what? Here we are now, at the end of the mandate of the Liberal government, and this government has still refused to make a firm commitment. I just want you to know that the people not just in Cambridge but in all of the region of Waterloo are very concerned about what they perceive to be the games that are being played by the government. This hospital was ready to go. Since that time, this government has made other announcements about other funding to other hospitals, yet this hospital is still waiting. It is a growing community and it has an old hospital.

This government needs to recognize that when you're moving forward, you've got to let the public know how much things are going to cost and you have to provide a

firm timeline as to when you're going to see the completion of any project.

So that's the arm's-length Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion.

Let's move now to schedules K and F. This also refers to health protection and promotion, and it clarifies the powers of the Ontario chief medical officer of health.

We were very blessed in this province to have had Sheela Basrur as our chief medical officer of health. She did an outstanding job. I just want to take this opportunity. I know that she continues to fight her battle with cancer. I know I speak for everybody in this House when I say that we appreciate the leadership that she provided, we appreciate her dedication and commitment to health promotion and disease prevention, and I know that each one of us continues to pray and wish her a speedy recovery.

Let's now take a look at Ontario medical officers of health. This legislation doesn't address the very critical shortage of medical officers of health that we have in the province today. In fact, one third of the public health units are without a full-time medical officer of health; in other words, 12 of 36 public health units in this province. So my question to the Minister of Health is, why are those positions not being filled?

If I take a look at the schedules that we have here in front of us, schedules K and F, unfortunately these schedules emphasize Ontario's deficit of health human resources. I think in some respects, when you take a look at the fact that one third of the units are without a full-time medical officer of health, we see a lack of commitment to better public health. And it is important that we move forward to fill those positions; it's important that we move forward to make sure that we have a full-time chief medical officer of health. I know that Dr. George Pasut is doing a great job and has done exemplary work, but obviously it is important that we do find a permanent replacement for Sheela.

I just want to point out that the SARS commission did recommend that the chief medical officer of health have a much more active role in the agency for health promotion and protection. That's why I hope that the Minister of Health will explain why this legislation seems to be taking a completely opposite approach to the recommendation of Justice Campbell, considering the importance and the benefit of coordinated and unified leadership if another SARS-like outbreak occurred. I guess I wonder why this legislation prevents the chief medical officer of health from having a voting seat on the board of an agency for health protection and promotion, as well as only giving the chief medical officer of health a very autonomous role within this agency.

Schedule L of this legislation would make a number of changes to the Drug and Pharmacies Regulation Act. Some of these changes would include permitting a pharmacist to dispense a drug following a prescription "authorized by a prescriber licensed to practise in a province or territory of Canada other than Ontario if, in

the professional judgment of the pharmacist, the patient requires the drug.”

Allowing the college to more quickly revoke or suspend a pharmacy's certificate of accreditation is also part of this schedule, if there are concerns about a pharmacy's operation and where public safety may be at issue, and provides that “only an intern, a registered pharmacy student or a pharmacy technician, all acting under the supervision of a pharmacist ... are entitled to compound, dispense, or sell any drug in a pharmacy.”

Further, regarding schedule L, I just want to read an e-mail that was sent to me from the Ontario College of Pharmacists on March 8 of this year. The e-mail concerns the proposed changes to the Drug and Pharmacies Regulation Act. It says:

“The OCP very much supports Bill 171 and considers the passage of this bill will provide regulatory health colleges with the ability to more effectively and efficiently regulate our professions in the public interest.

“Schedule L is an amended Drug and Pharmacies Regulation Act and is of particular importance to this college because it is the legislation that gives us the authority to regulate the place of pharmacy practice and the sale of drugs within the place. We are pleased that the amendments that our college has approved and put forward ... are included in the bill.”

They say that this will be good news for patients in northern and eastern Ontario who obtain their medical services and prescriptions from physicians in Manitoba and Quebec and currently cannot have these prescriptions filled in Ontario. So they are certainly supportive of that initiative.

They're also supportive of the amendments that will permit the college to take quick action to close down a pharmacy where there is compelling evidence that continued operation of that pharmacy could put the public at risk. If we hearken back to a situation in Hamilton in 2005 when a counterfeit product was being dispensed from a pharmacy, the college did close the pharmacy in five business days, but they had to go to the provincial courts to obtain the right to do so under current legislation. They are quite happy, then, with the changes that are being proposed.

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Although it's good news that patients in northern and eastern Ontario are going to be able to have their prescriptions filled in Manitoba and Quebec, I guess it is a little bit worrisome that we can't provide those services to people in our own province. And I guess in this respect the government has failed to provide Ontarians living in remote communities with the necessary and adequate access to health human resources. It is really a prime example of the fact that many Ontarians today are still forced to obtain their medical services and procedures outside of the province of Ontario.

I want to move now to schedule N of Bill 171. Schedule N of the legislation promotes the use of automated external heart defibrillators. Our party actually did invest in this program; we spent about \$9 million. We

actually trained and equipped over 4,500 paramedics in Ontario and we obviously support this component of the legislation, schedule N, because it's going to make sure that AEDs are easier for public use.

I think we all know too that in the past there have been people who have passed away, tragically, and that if we had had the defibrillators in the schools or in the arenas, we probably could have saved some lives. I think it's important that the government move ahead in this regard, and we certainly support their commitment to do so.

I want to now move to schedules O, P and Q. These are important, because what these schedules do is add four more regulated health professions under the Regulated Health Professions Act. Although there are going to be four more regulated health professions, there are only going to be three new colleges.

Schedule O is called the Kinesiology Act, and it will regulate the new profession of kinesiology. They will have a College of Kinesiology of Ontario to be created.

Schedule P, the Naturopathy and Homeopathy Act, 2006, is going to regulate the new professions of naturopathy and homeopathy, and create a college which combines both of those professions. It's also going to permit naturopaths to use the title of “doctor,” but they may only do so if the phrase “doctor of naturopathy” immediately follows his or her name.

Schedule Q, the Psychotherapy Act, 2006, will regulate the new profession of psychotherapy and create the College of Psychotherapists of Ontario.

This is quite significant, it's important, and it will allow for better protection of the public. It will create new colleges, and certainly I think for all of these four regulated health professional groups, this is very, very good news. It's something they have been asking for.

Unfortunately, there is some concern about the fact that the creation of these four colleges is buried within this huge omnibus bill. I think there is some reason for concern in that regard. If you take a look at Bill 50, which we discussed last year, which regulated traditional Chinese medicine, it took us over a year to address that one, single profession. Now this House, the public and the health professionals are being asked to address the establishment of three new regulatory colleges and the introduction of four more regulated health professions. I hope we will have an opportunity to debate this and that everybody will have ample opportunity to voice any concerns they might have.

I just want to deal with schedule P. I received a letter from the Homeopathic Medical Council of Canada regarding the Health System Improvements Act, schedule P, the Naturopathy and Homeopathy Act. They say this:

“We the president and board of directors of the Homeopathic Medical Council of Canada ... believe that Bill 171, if passed in the present format, will not be responsive to the needs of the Ontario public, and it will be the greatest disservice to the future of homeopathy, in this province and in Canada.

“We respectfully approach you to amend this Bill 171 for the following reasons:

“(1) The bill is biased in favour of naturopathy. It allows the naturopaths several controlled acts and denies the same to homeopaths;

“(2) It is recommended in the HPRAC report to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care that homeopaths and naturopaths be co-located in the same place, after proposing preferential treatment to naturopaths. This is the greatest disservice to homeopathy;

“(3) The HPRAC chair, Ms. Barbara Sullivan, employed a retired pharmacist, Mr. Jim Dunsdon, with no knowledge of homeopathy, the beneficiaries of this being a couple of business people and the naturopathic college.”

They go on to indicate that they have some concerns about the report that was provided by Mr. Dunsdon and the fact that he told them there were only 200 homeopaths in the province. They say there are closer to 1,000.

I think you can see that not everybody agrees with the direction of this bill. They don't think this bill is going to serve the profession, nor will it be responsive to the needs of the public.

So what are they asking for? They want modification of schedule P, and they are suggesting the following amendments:

“The formation of a separate council of homeopathy responsible for making regulations under the new act;

“Establishing an educational and research facility of homeopathy in Ontario, funded by the South Asian community and the professional members of the various homeopathic associations...; and

“Inclusion of homeopathy experts and educated professionals from accredited schools of homeopathy to act in consultations related to homeopathy.”

That letter is from Ranvir Sharda, the president of the Homeopathic Medical Council of Canada. That's their impression of schedule P, and I think it's important to get that on the record.

Having said that, I do know that the Ontario College of Homeopathic Medicine, in speaking to this particular issue, supports the fact that homeopathy is going to be regulated. They talk about the proposal for the joint college with the naturopaths. They do believe it's obviously crucial that homeopathy remain a distinct profession and have a clear scope of practice separate from naturopaths. They point out that there may be people who have concerns about the joint college, and they indicate that they did, originally, but they do recognize that at this point in time a joint college would be beneficial to their profession. I think it's important we get that on the record.

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They also say that it's going to be crucial to ensure equal representation of homeopaths and naturopaths on the council of the college, and they indicate that they have insisted to the government that that is important and that this would be clearly stated in Bill 171. They do take some credit for their efforts in bringing this initiative forward. Certainly, I congratulate all of the health professionals in this province who have worked so hard to

ensure that there are going to be new regulated colleges and professions. I think that's very important. This is another letter that needs to be taken into consideration.

There is one issue in Bill 171 that has been of more concern to people in the province of Ontario than any other issue. In fact, I would suggest that almost every one of the 103 MPPs in this Legislature probably received at least one letter, and that letter would have been from a social worker. Schedule Q, which adds four more regulated health professions under the Regulated Health Professions Act, excluded social workers from the regulation of psychotherapy. I got e-mails; I got faxes; I got phone calls; I was stopped on the street. Because in Kitchener-Waterloo we do have a school of social work. We have a lot of students. I had the opportunity to spend some time with them. We have, of course, the faculty, the professors. We have a lot of agencies who employ social workers. I heard a lot about the government mistake in excluding social workers from the regulation of psychotherapy.

This concern was based on the fact as well that we know that we face some very serious mental illness challenges in this province. I think people were quite shocked and quite surprised that the Liberal government did not initially adopt the recommendation of HPRAC in this regard, and that was to include the social workers in the regulation of psychotherapy. This was a glaring, glaring omission. As I say, it has to do with the fact that there's challenge when it comes to mental illness and providing treatment and services. If we keep in mind—and I don't think most people fully appreciate it, but about one in five Ontarians will suffer from mental illness at some point in their life. So if you take a look at this House, you see that there are people, according to that statistic, who are going to suffer from mental illness.

I think we also have to recognize that when someone suffers from mental illness, it's like any other illness, but it affects not only your health, but your job and your family. So if we do not include social workers, then we could seriously impact the access that people have to mental health services. So I think it's important that we deal with this issue. I had written to the minister. I had met with numerous delegations here in Toronto and in my office in Waterloo. I had said to the minister and to the government that we were definitely going to be putting forth amendments to address this concern that social workers were excluded from the proposed regulation of psychotherapy.

I just want to read some of the letters in this House from people who were concerned. For example, I heard that there were 4,406 social workers who were listed in the College of Social Work and Social Service Workers as working in mental health and addictions, and 53% of these people practised psychotherapy. Obviously, if they weren't going to be able to do so, a lot of agencies—publicly funded agencies, organizations, privately funded services—were going to be impacted. Counselling would be impacted. Obviously, this exclusion was unjustifiable. It was at odds with the recognition of social work as a

key provider of psychotherapy by HPRAC in its report. So the only solution that the Ontario Association of Social Workers found acceptable was an amendment that would grant qualified social workers full recognition for their skills as psychotherapists and the granting of authority to the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers to set standards and regulate this intervention with its social work members. They wanted us to include social workers as the fifth profession qualified to provide psychotherapy services in Ontario. Certainly, I had agreed that I would move forward and do exactly that.

Here's a letter from Maureen Lewis, who again points out how unfair it was of the government to exclude social workers from the regulation of psychotherapy and the impact it would have on people in the province of Ontario. It would undermine both mental health reform and primary health reform, which are stated priorities of the provincial government. Again, she asks for an amendment.

I have a letter here from Shazia Fatima, who writes me that she's a student of social work and, again, she's concerned about the negative implications of the bill and the fact that social workers were excluded from the provision of psychotherapy. She is beseeching me to seek amendments in line with the HPRAC recommendations. That, again, is somebody who speaks for, I can tell you, hundreds of other people.

There's a letter here from Melissa Pyne. Again, she talks about the fact that it's absolutely essential that social workers are able to provide psychotherapy, and the importance of that.

Southern Ontario Counselling Centre: Again, they are concerned and they recognize that it is absolutely essential, that if it doesn't happen, the public won't have access to psychotherapy as they do today. It's going to impact hospitals, community-based health and mental health centres, family health teams, family service agencies, and social work services in schools.

Those are just a few of the e-mails, the faxes, and the phone calls that I received. I understand that with all of the mail and the phone calls and communications that have been flooding into the office of the Minister of Health, including letters, certainly, that I have sent and my colleagues have sent indicating that this glaring omission needs to be addressed, the Minister of Health has finally recognized that an error was made and has indicated an intention to present a legislative amendment that will "recognize the profession and ensure that those social workers who provide psychotherapy services associated with the new controlled act will continue to be able to provide these very important services." I would commit to the social workers today that we're going to hold the government accountable to that promise. We also hope there will be public hearings, and we will be putting forth our own amendments to address this concern.

On schedule Q, another issue—this also relates to social workers—is the issue concerning a social worker's

inability to use the title "doctor" while in private practice. Again, my office has received many letters and phone calls regarding concerns that the McGuinty government has ignored the recommendations of HPRAC concerning the recommendation that allows social workers the benefit of retaining their doctoral title while providing care in private practice.

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For the benefit of the people here watching and in the Legislature, I want to read one letter of many which my office has received concerning the restriction of the use of the title "doctor." This letter is from Pam Baldwin:

"Dear Ms. Witmer,

"I am currently a practising social worker in the regional municipality of Waterloo and reside in Waterloo.

"I am writing to express my concern with ... Bill 171...." Then she talks about stripping "all social workers from the regulated right to practise 'psychotherapy,'" and also the act's removing from "Ph.D. social workers the right to use the title 'doctor,'" despite having earned a Ph.D. in clinical social work."

She says, "The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care ... has not followed the recommendations made by the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council ... in the highly credible Regulation of Health Professions Ontario: New Directions report," which does recognize "social workers as one of the key professions qualified to provide psychotherapy."

She goes on to say that only members of the new college are going to be able to use the term "psychotherapist" or "registered mental health therapist." She goes on to talk about what some of the points are that others have made. Then she goes on to say that:

"Ontario is the only English-speaking jurisdiction in the world that places restrictions on the use of the title 'doctor' by health care providers....

"The public interest is not served by maintaining the restriction.

"The monopoly on the use of the title 'doctor' is discriminatory.

"I am sincerely asking you to seek amendments in line with the HPRAC recommendations."

I'm not quite sure why the minister didn't follow through. I think Barbara Sullivan and her committee did an outstanding job, but it seems that there was some cherry-picking in places. This is a really important issue, this issue of the "doctor" title, because I think it has encouraged social workers—sometimes, if they don't have the title, they would leave our jurisdiction. I think that if we lose any health professional in this province, it is a huge loss to us.

I want to read from a working paper that I have received from a committee of senior social workers regarding their views on the use of the title "doctor." I'm speaking now on behalf of this group of very senior social workers who have university-granted doctorates. They are calling on you, Mr. Smitherman, Minister of Health, and the government "to modify section 33 of the

Regulated Health Professions Act, which places restrictions on social workers' use of the title 'doctor' when providing or offering to provide health care to individuals in Ontario."

This amendment has been recommended by the New Directions report, suggesting in section 34.4 that no person can "use the title 'doctor'" unless "indicating the discipline in which the person holds the doctorate."

The Quebec legislation is a model to act by, and they recommend that the profession be delineated after the name along with the doctoral degree indication. For example, if we had a doctor—and there is one I know, Dr. Nancy Riedel Bowers—"RSW Ph.D." would indicate "Registered Social Worker and Doctor of Philosophy."

If we take a look at the Quebec legislation, take a look at some of the history behind this recommendation regarding the "doctor" title, it should be noted that the restriction that we have is an anomaly specific to Ontario. No other jurisdiction in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia or New Zealand have such restrictions. The anomaly violates the centuries-old universally respected right of universities to grant degrees with all the "attendant rights, privileges, and obligations." Because the restriction is specific to Ontario, it is prejudicial and violates the very letter of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. By imposing the restriction on the use of the title, the entire profession is devalued, a profession whose practice for over a century has been integral to the provision of health services in Ontario. This restriction is not in the best interests of the people of Ontario, nor is it in their best interests to allow a monopolistic climate for the provision of health care services.

I just want to let you know, according to these people—I'm quoting them—how this could impede their practice. Where a social worker with a doctoral degree teaches at a university, they can use their title "doctor." When they move to private practice, the title is restricted. Again, I'll use the example of Nancy Riedel Bowers. They take their title on and off every day in their careers. I think it's important that we deal with that particular issue and that the government makes some changes. We are the only geographical location in the world that restricts the use of the "doctor" title. Certainly, people aren't going to come to this province if they're going to be restricted in this way. I think we want to encourage people to come to the province of Ontario. So I urge the government to follow the recommendations of HPRAC.

I see that I'm running out of time. As you can see, this is a huge bill. There are so many points that I haven't been able to bring to the attention of the House. Suffice it to say it's an omnibus bill. It's a huge bill. It probably impacts more people in the province than any other bill that's been introduced. Obviously, we need to make sure that we get it right. I hope the government will be responsive to our amendments and the concerns that have been expressed by people in the province.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): It's my privilege to speak about Bill 171. As you can see, it is a big bill. It covers a huge amount of territory. We have some concerns, and I'm looking forward to raising those concerns, the voices of constituents and stakeholders. There are some positive moves as well. I think in particular of schedule N of the 17 schedules that this omnibus bill covers. Schedule N is called the Chase McEachern Act. I'd like to hold up the name of Chase McEachern, a little 12-year-old boy who passed away and who did some courageous work around the use of defibrillators in public places. Of course, we in the New Democratic Party support that and support many of the various schedules here.

There are omissions, though. There are amendments that are needed. Certainly, this is a bill that needs to go to committee. It needs to go to hearings. We don't want to see it delayed, because of sections like schedule N and Chase McEachern and others. I too have heard, like many members here, from social workers, but I've also heard from pastoral care workers and others. I've heard from homeopaths and naturopaths, the many, myriad stakeholders who are concerned with this bill and whom this bill concerns. So it would be doing all of these various stakeholders a gross injustice not to look at them, their roles, and not to look at this bill with some detail. I look forward to doing that in the time allotted today for a bill that covers everything from water to immunization to colleges to air ambulances. Again, the Liberals used to complain when the Tories brought in such an omnibus bill. I gather what is good for the goose is not so good for the gander here.

I look forward to this and to discuss some of the schedules within the time allotted. I thank you for this opportunity.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I just want to clear up a few things for the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, as she was addressing this bill over her time. First, in regard to the proposed transfer of responsibility for small drinking water systems from the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: After some great consultation by the Ministry of the Environment with drinking water experts, stakeholder groups, system owners, operators—and this would include many of the water systems. I'll give you some examples: large municipal non-residential, such as municipally owned airports, industrial parks, large sports and recreational facilities; also things like private cottages that have communal drinking water systems. But after this entire consultation, the provincial government is taking on 100% of the costs for start-up costs under this legislation.

Also, when it comes to our Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, the agency has initial base funding of \$29.5 million.

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The member for Kitchener–Waterloo was also discussing this agency in terms of its model, its set-up and how it should be. Well, the recommendations that

came to the agency under the implementation task force under the Campbell report explicitly refer to the BC and Quebec model agencies, which are both arm's-length from the government, as this agency will be. This agency will be based on best practices. It will be working with the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta in the United States and will do a great deal in keeping all Ontarians healthier.

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): The first thing I'd like to do is congratulate and thank the critic for our party for the wonderful talk that she gave on this bill, because it's an omnibus bill, the Health System Improvements Act. It's strange that it would come into this House near the end of the reign of a government that has put us in last place in economic situations and things like that. It's strange they'd bring in all this omnibus stuff when actually they don't know what they're talking about half the time, and they want to bring in something like this and expect us to support it without even going to committee. I'm sure this will be going to committee, but I wonder when the committee will take place, because, as you know, we don't even know how long they're going to last, especially when they've come to the end of their reign of terror, you might say, across the province.

As I say, this is an omnibus bill, so there are things in there you can support. There are things in there that aren't very good for the people of Ontario. Unfortunately, that's what they do when they bring in an omnibus bill: They put some things that they know people can't support in there, and they know it's wrong. Now, they may listen to some amendments; hopefully they will.

And it's really a shame to hear that only a third of our health units have medical officers. What happened on this watch? What happened to this ministry over there? They have a minister who likes to come into this House and huff and puff and blow, but maybe he's not doing anything in there; I don't know. It seems strange that we wouldn't have medical health officers in Ontario. And he picks out four more professionals they are going to regulate. Well, that's fine, but throw them all in one bill and let's hope that everybody supports it.

As I say, it's unfortunate that a government that's had this reign across Ontario and has pretty nearly ruined Ontario in their four years has to come up with a bill like this near the end of their mandate.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I'd just like to take an opportunity to thank the member from Kitchener and her dedication to health care in terms of her being a former minister and also, in an opposition way, trying to present some options to the minister and what she's heard in her riding. I think that's an appropriate thing to do, to show where some of the concerns are in the bill.

The other thing I'd like to mention very quickly is that the opposition has really jumped on the social worker issue, and yet it's already been somewhat resolved. The minister has already indicated in a letter to them that it's going to be rectified. There was an option to do this in regulation, which he thought was going to be adequate.

The response has been that it's going to be taken care of in an amendment during committee work and it's going to be taken care of.

Instead, what do they try to do? They keep harping on the issue to score a couple of political points for those who want to hear the complaints and pound the desks and the chests about how social workers weren't listened to, weren't dealt with. And yet all of a sudden they won't acknowledge—and if they do, it's a very tepid, mild acknowledgement—that the minister got it right.

Quite frankly, I'd like to thank the minister for showing that initiative, for showing the capacity to listen. Even before the committee work starts, he's already responding. It's a matter of whether or not he's getting that recognition. Unfortunately, the way this system works, it's not going to come from the opposition, so I'll take a moment to say to that Minister of Health, thank you so much for responding so quickly to the concerns.

Indeed, I got the letters too from the social workers, and I've been quick to respond. I'm not sure if the opposition's been doing it, but I've been quick to respond that the minister has sent the letter out and has already made the suggestion that the amendment's going to take place. But would the opposition be putting that in their letters or their e-mails back immediately? In some cases, I'm looking directly at the person I know, and I know she would be doing that. Unfortunately, the way this system works, I don't think it's happening from all of the members on that side.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Mrs. Witmer: I'd like to thank those who participated. The member for Parkdale-High Park pointed out that it was the government that used to object to the omnibus bills that we introduced and now we seem to be getting the same thing. There's a lot of information to be assessed and discussed in a very short period of time as we near the end of our four-year term.

I'd like to thank the member for Mississauga East for his comments. I would just remind him that I think people are looking for ongoing funding and they're looking for implementation plans and just a little bit more detail. The concerns that I expressed actually were concerns that I'd heard from stakeholders. None of these concerns are ones that I have created myself. I'm trying to reflect what I hear.

I want to thank the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Again, he's pointed out that one third of the medical officer of health positions are vacant today and that's certainly of concern, particularly if we hearken back to SARS and the fact that there really is nobody to assume leadership within those communities.

I'd like to thank the member for Brant. I would say to him, I actually found out about the fact that there may be a change to the issue of psychotherapy as it related to social workers from the social workers themselves, who wanted to just give me a heads-up that the minister might be making a change. Lo and behold, he did, and that's fine. So now my letters do reflect that. But having said

that, I would also commit to all the people who had concerns and who flocked to my office that we're going to make sure that the minister lives up to that commitment and that the social workers are included.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It's a pleasure to speak to some aspects of this bill, not all of the aspects. Shelley Martel, our friend and colleague from Nickel Belt, already did that on March 20.

So those of you who are able to watch this parliamentary channel—and I know those of you who have Rogers are going to have a difficult time accessing this parliamentary debate because now, unless you've got digital services coming into your home, you won't be able to get Rogers cable. If you do, you've got to pay, and if you're getting it, you've got to go to channel 105. So my sense is that we have a diminished crowd of people watching this parliamentary channel, which is a shame, because a whole lot of people love to watch the Minister of Health. I don't know, George. They're going to miss you.

I wrote my letter to Rogers cable complaining. I hope you did too, and I hope a lot of you have written your letters to Rogers cable complaining, because if we all do the same, Rogers may have to change its policies around providing the service that people used to get for free. We were normally on channel 72 and now we're going to be bumped up to 105, and you've got to pay about eight bucks. So I urge all of you to urge your Liberal and Conservative members to write those letters to Rogers posthaste.

I want to say this is an omnibus bill. Member for Brant, you would know that in opposition so many of you, including, I suspect, the Minister of Health, would have attacked the Conservative government, and we attacked the Conservative government, for introducing omnibus bills. I am sure, Minister of Health, you are on the record. I don't have to check.

This is what I want to say. I'm not going to complain about omnibus bills because we've all done this complaint thing. All I want and expect from you is that when you get to opposition again, please don't complain or attack the new government as it relates to omnibus bills. Please. Is that an agreement we have? And just remember, because the Tories used to do this on a regular basis and we attacked them, and I suspect we New Democrats did the same when we were in government as well. So I'm not going to attack you for that, Minister of Health. But there are 17 different schedules and there are 42 different acts to deal with.

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I recall having debated the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act, a stand-alone act for which we had many hearings. It was one act around traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture. That took some time. We had a whole lot of people wanting to make deputations. We had a good debate in this Legislature on one regulated profession. Now we're dealing with a whole lot more regulated professions, which, of course, is a good thing.

The member from Nickel Belt pointed out that New Democrats introduced 21 regulated health care professions in the 1990s, and so we support additional measures to regulate others, as we are doing here today with naturopathy, homeopathy, kinesiology, physiotherapy and so on. So we are not fighting the need to regulate other professions.

As I say, those willing or wanting to see a much more in-depth discussion of a lot of these schedules should refer to the Hansard and comments made by our critic, Shelley Martel, on March 20.

I have to tell you, I get very nervous when acronyms are used on a regular basis in this Legislature. An acronym, such as HPRAC, which never gets spelled out, really bothers me. I'm sure it bothers those of you who are watching tonight. What is HPRAC? Nobody spells it out. I even have to look it up. Most people in this House don't have a clue what HPRAC is. I had to write it down to be able to remember. It's the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council. People use these acronyms on a regular basis; everybody does it. You've got to spell out these acronyms. The minister has to help us, the critics have to help us, other members speaking have to help us so that we are not having to guess about what these acronyms are. Everyone does it on a regular basis, as if we are Ministers of Health or health critics, for God's sake, and most of us are neither critics of health and/or Ministers of Health. So I urge people to be very, very cautious about the use of acronyms.

I want to start by talking about a section of the bill, schedule M, which talks about the college website. This section talks about the following: The proposed amendment requires the college to have a website, and upon request, the college shall provide the prescribed information in paper or electronic form. We all know there is no regulation yet that prescribes what is to be posted, and depending on what the regulations say, this information, of course, may affect the college's policy on the release of physician information in batch form etc.

There's a little bit of a problem, because I'm not quite sure what it is that we want to prescribe on that website. It would be useful if the minister and/or the parliamentary assistant or others who comment on this would help us as to what information they believe should be on that website, what they think ought to be on that website, or what might be prescribed. I suspect the Minister of Health or the parliamentary assistant might have some inkling of that; I'm not sure. But it would be nice to be able to get a sense of what it is that will be on that website.

We know that hospitals are not covered by the freedom of information legislation, which would force them to disclose mistakes and surgical complication rates. Unlike the university and college system, hospitals are not covered by freedom of information legislation. The College of Physicians and Surgeons, the doctors' self-regulating body, does not disclose how many complaints have been filed against a doctor. This is a problem. We know that there are 27,000 people who die

each year in Canada from in-hospital problems, but the Canadian Institute for Health Information does not release detailed information to the public about what it is that people die of. It would be useful to know.

In other jurisdictions, some of these things are listed on their websites. In Manitoba, patients can look up any malpractice judgments, criminal convictions or disciplinary actions against a physician on the province's college of physicians and surgeons website. Is this what the government thinks should be on the website? It would be good if the government member spoke to that particular issue. If in Manitoba we're able to look up malpractice judgments, criminal convictions or disciplinary actions against a physician on a website, surely we can do the same in Ontario. I think people have a right to that information.

The Toronto Star just revealed a story just a week ago in a series which documented, in one case, more than a dozen women who have claimed that they suffered physical and emotional harm under one Toronto doctor's care, yet there is no way that patients can learn anything about the doctor in advance of that surgery. People have a right to know. They should be able to know. Specifically, Ontario hospitals should come under provincial freedom of information legislation, and hospitals should be required to post on their websites clear and understandable information about the services they provide, and the college of physicians and surgeons should post all malpractice judgments and criminal convictions.

We are hoping that this is an opportunity, given that it's an omnibus bill, to be able to deal with this particular issue. I am hoping that we will be able to do that, and I'm sure that when we send this to hearings, we will get more people talking about this particular issue. As the Minister of Health was able to say, "Look, we overlooked something around social workers." Social workers practise psychotherapy, and in this particular bill they would have been excluded from doing so. So he recognized—under pressure, perhaps; I'm not sure. Because I know Shelley Martel, our critic, sent letters to him and she advised him and his ministry staff of this particular problem. And I'm sure he got his own letters. But he was able to obviously, from that information, realize that changes needed to be made, and he announced in the speech that he made in the House a couple of days ago that "If it is the will of the Legislature to proceed to the committee stage of the legislative process of Bill 171, we intend to present legislative amendments that will recognize the profession and ensure that those social workers who provide psychotherapy services associated with the new controlled act will continue to be able to provide these very important services."

We are in agreement, in opposition, to take these discussions and this particular bill into committee. We want to be able to tour with this bill around the province so the minister will, through his parliamentary assistant, have the opportunity to say, "Look, social workers will be dealt with either in this bill or by an amendment to another bill." And in the same way that he did that,

perhaps he might want to comment on the website vis-à-vis the comments I made earlier.

The other matter of importance, at least to me, in terms of the attention that it got from me, is schedule K, which establishes the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. As the critic for the Conservative Party mentioned and indeed our own critic mentioned, this schedule establishes a new agency as a crown agency "to provide scientific and technical advice and support those working to ... promote the health of Ontarians." An additional set of responsibilities includes, "to carry out and support activities such as public health research, surveillance, epidemiology"—which basically means the study of incidence and distribution and control of disease—"planning and evaluation."

I support this new agency, because it serves an important purpose. It remains to be seen how much money is going to be put into this agency, true, but that can be debated later on. But in terms of the purpose of this agency, I am in support of it.

There is a problem. In the final report of the Agency Implementation Task Force, which was released last March 26, the task force recommended that the new Ontario Agency for Health Promotion and Protection be established with an arm's-length relationship from the government. The minister, in his speech a couple of days ago, mentioned pretty much the same and is quite pleased to report that it will be independent.

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In the same speech, the minister lauds Mr. Justice Archie Campbell for his work in advising the minister around many, many particular issues. But Justice Archie Campbell has a different opinion around the independence of this particular agency, and I want to quote some of the comments that were made by Justice Campbell because they are clearly in contradiction, or at least in glaring opposition, to what the minister has proposed, including what the agency implementation task force has proposed.

Justice Archie Campbell says:

"Although there is much wisdom in the proposal for an Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, the recommended structure fails to take into account the major SARS problem of divided authority and accountability....

"The SARS response was also hamstrung by an unwieldy emergency leadership structure with no one clearly in charge. A de facto arrangement, whereby the chief medical officer of health of the day shared authority with the commission of public safety and security, resulted in a lack of clarity as to their respective roles, which contributed to hindering the SARS response.

"An important lesson from SARS is that the last thing Ontario needs in planning for the next outbreak and to deal with it when it happens is another major independent player on the block.

"First, the structure of the new agency or centre, which will combine advisory and operational functions, must reflect the appropriate balance between indepen-

dence and accountability, whether it is established as a crown corporation or some other form of agency insulated from direct ministerial control. The commission in fact recommended a much different arrangement in its first interim report and warned against another silo—"another autonomous body—"when SARS demonstrated the dangers of such uncoordinated entities.

"Second, it should be an adjunct to the work of the chief medical officer of health and the local medical officers of health, not a competing body. SARS showed that there are already enough autonomous players on the block who can get in each other's way if not properly coordinated. There is always a danger in introducing a semiautonomous body into a system like public health that is accountable to the public through the government. The risk is that such a body can take on a life of its own and an ivory tower agenda of its own that does not necessarily serve the public interest it was designed to support. The implementation task force took a completely opposite approach, recommending against giving the chief medical officer of health a seat as a voting member of the board and recommending a very autonomous role for the agency."

I'm quoting from Justice Campbell, who said a number of things that are in direct contradiction to what the minister is proposing here, and I think we need to take this seriously. I am normally very, very supportive of certain agents of the crown being independent of government. An example of that is the Ombudsman. Another example is the child advocate. I spoke to this bill last week and attacked one measure which I believe, if I recall, was subsection 13(2), which spoke about the child advocate having to report to the minister before issuing his or her final report. That, to me, meant that the child advocate would not have the independence that he or she deserved. I support independence in that instance because I believe the child advocate should not in any way be influenced by the minister or the government, including the Ombudsman. But in this particular instance, where Justice Campbell talks about the problem of having an autonomous agency which might create a silo, an autonomous board accountable to itself and separate from other agencies, that such an agency could work against itself or against our interest, the public's interest, and including possibly the interests of the minister. So in this particular instance I am a bit cautious and wary about creating an independent agency that Justice Campbell said would be a mistake. If we value his judgment, as the minister has indicated—and I indeed value his judgement on this matter—we have to take that seriously. I am hoping that the minister has not closed himself completely to this particular issue and that based on what we get at the hearings, which might include Justice Campbell, I don't know, but based on what we get from the hearings from other people—

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: We'll be listening.

Mr. Marchese: George, you and he are going to chat. You'll be listening. That's good. We want the Minister of

Health to be listening, and if indeed he's listening, that's all we can hope for, right?

So those are the two points that I wanted to raise that are of major importance to me. I was going to talk about another one briefly, but I won't have too much time, which includes, on page 32—well, I won't have time to be able to talk about another issue, so I'm going to say that we are looking forward to hearings on this particular bill. We're looking for people to be able to comment on some of these schedules. We know there will be a lot of support, but we know as well that there will be a lot of questions that will be raised, such as the ones I have touched on. We are optimistic that the minister is listening.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Fonseca: It was great to hear the comments for the member for Trinity-Spadina and his support for many pieces of this legislation. He knows it will be a great piece of legislation once it goes through to third reading.

Strengthening, shaping and supporting our health services: This is what it's all about; building capacity, making sure we're providing more access and, yes, as member for Trinity-Spadina asked for, much, much more transparency.

The amendments proposed in this bill would reinforce and enhance our health system in a number of ways: promoting greater accountability with a new medical billing review process and review board, better protecting patients with increased transparency and effectiveness in how health professional colleges operate. I'll give you one example right here, and I know the member for Trinity-Spadina spoke to this. Right now, due to confidentiality provisions, colleges are not permitted to inform the public that an investigation of a member is in progress. This is problematic if the member's conduct has received extensive media attention or has resulted in a criminal conviction. But Bill 171, if passed, would allow colleges to inform the public that an investigation regarding a member is or is not in progress where there is public interest to do so—just one of the ways that this legislation will help our health care system. We'll be promoting more public health, which we should do; increasing patient access to services and creating new health professional colleges like naturopaths, homeopaths; shaping and supporting ministry programs and services; looking again at what we're doing in terms of transparency, communication with complaints. Many times, complaints used to come in and go into a black hole. Today, the colleges would be obliged to communicate back with those making those complaints.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to respond to the member from Trinity-Spadina's comments tonight. I don't know how long the committee debate is going to go on on second reading, but I think basically the number one issue with this piece of legislation has been addressed. Anyhow, I've been receiving all kinds of copies of the letter Minister Smitherman set sent out to Rachel Birnbaum and Dan Andreae that has

basically clarified the fact that social workers will be included. I know that from day one that was the issue that my constituents dealt with.

Now, I understand we are going to committee; there will be amendments made at that point. There may or may not be other amendments that people who come forward may want to make to the bill, and I think we should listen carefully to them, but I can tell you that I have received probably 30 or 40 letters and e-mails on the inclusion of social workers under this bill, and that seems to be the issue most people would be concerned about at this point.

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As the member from Trinity–Spadina said, there may be other areas we want to zero in on at committee hearings, but as long as we can count on the fact that social workers will be included—and we got a letter from the minister that I'm sure he must know has been circulated across the province to pretty nearly every social worker organization—I think that should address the basic concerns. After that, we can continue on and look at some of the other possible amendments that can be made. Other than that, I haven't got a lot to add to the member for Trinity–Spadina's comments. I do know that as long as we can address the inclusion of social workers, we should keep most of our constituents happy. I think the rest of the bill has been ongoing for some time. I think it's a piece of legislation that we should probably all look at supporting in the end.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park.

I wonder if the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who has been carrying on a conversation well in excess of an hour, if he must continue to do so, would at least be a little quieter because I think all of us have heard all parts of your conversation here tonight.

The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. DiNovo: I particularly thank my colleague from Trinity–Spadina. He's always engaging, he's always articulate and he always points out that which needs to be pointed out, and so I think I'll just use the balance of my two minutes really to address some of the concerns raised by some of the other members.

The member from Brant and the member from Simcoe North both raised this problem, which I don't think is not a problem in the Westminster model of oppositional government, and that is that we not only oppose but we challenge and hopefully we flesh out government-inspired legislation to make it better. That's the intent of this House, and that's the intent I intend to speak to around Bill 171.

Yes, I did receive the Minister of Health's letter, and yes, I did send that letter out to the social workers who raised their concerns. That's not the issue here. I think the issue is, rather, to look at the details of this legislation and to get some of those devils out; and also, hopefully, to point some direction to the hearings that happen, and that happen quickly rather than slowly, because of the positive aspects of Bill 171, and I pointed to one of those.

I'm going to raise the sheroes and the heroes involved in this bill, Chase McEachern being one, Dr. Hsu being another, people who have passed from our midst and yet have left us an amazing legacy.

Chase McEachern, again, was a 12-year-old who worked before his death on getting defibrillators into public spaces. We want to see that happen; we want to see it now, not a month from now, or two months from now or next fall.

I had a wonderful visit from the Heart and Stroke Foundation that absolutely encouraged all of us here to look at making that happen sooner rather than later, and to funding it fully so that we truly can see these life-saving devices put into community centres, put into public pools and schools, so that we might use them and might save lives.

Mr. Pat Hoy (Chatham–Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill for a few moments. I want to say that social workers came to my office as well and had a concern about the approach our government was taking, particularly when it comes to physiotherapy services. I explained what the government's approach was as it was then, and they seemed to have some difficulty with that, and I don't think they really understood, as many people do not, the regulatory regime that we have here and how many things can be dealt with properly and effectively through regulation. But the minister has given an indication to approach this in a different way and rectify the problem to satisfy those social workers who have very deep concern. I appreciate the minister's flexibility in this and giving his undertaking to rectify the problem, if indeed there was one to begin with.

This bill, if passed, is a very significant piece of legislation and brings about much-needed change. It will provide the people of this province with greater access to more health professionals. And of course, I'm sure we all hear that in our communities, that people are looking for more access. It will improve on the coordination of critical care ambulance transfers, which is something that I've also heard about in my community. It will streamline and increase the transparency and complaints procedures that are applied to all health professionals and regulatory colleges. So any time you can bring about more transparency, and provide for a complaints mechanism, I think that serves the public well. People are often concerned that they don't have the access, they don't have the means, they don't have a way to rectify a problem. This bill would also establish an Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, and we have the first Minister of Health Promotion ever in Ontario, Minister Watson.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Marchese: I want to thank all of my friends for having responded and would remind the other folks of a couple of things that I said. I was talking about the college website. The proposed amendment requires "the college to have a website and upon request, the college shall provide the prescribed information in paper or electronic form." I wasn't entirely clear about what this

website would do. It says that “the college shall provide prescribed information in paper, based on some request.” This isn’t entirely clear to me at all, and that’s why I talked about the issue of greater transparency.

Two Liberal members have already talked about transparency, and they say it as if we’re getting a lot of that in this bill. I mentioned something they didn’t speak to; the member from Mississauga East didn’t mention anything in this regard or the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. In Manitoba, patients can look up any malpractice judgments, criminal convictions, or disciplinary actions against a physician on the province’s College of Physicians and Surgeons website. If you want transparency, then you should speak to this, because that’s what your bill is not doing. From my reading, it isn’t doing that, and I hope that when you speak again about transparency, you’ll touch on that.

The other issue I spoke about is the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, and Justice Campbell said, “Look, don’t make it autonomous. It’s a problem. You’re going to create another independent player fighting other people. You’ll create another silo. It’s a problem.” He also said that “the chief medical officer of health have a hands-on role at the agency, including a seat on the board.” Unfortunately, the agency implementation task force took a completely opposite approach, recommending against giving the chief medical officer of health a seat as a voting member of the board and recommending a very autonomous role for the agency. These two issues need to be addressed, including other issues that my colleague from Nickel Belt raised.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to offer some comments on Bill 171. I want to try a little bit different approach, and that is just to preface my comments by indicating to the people who are watching that tonight is a very good example of how everyone is responding to the bill: offering constructive criticism, what their constituents are telling them, listening carefully to the opposition, notes being taken by the minister and the minister quietly responding to others to provide some information. That’s the type of thing I think the public wants us to do.

The other comment I want to make as a preamble is to talk about health care in a fluid manner. I look back since my time here and even before that, because I did some reading about how we have taken certain bills and included the evolution of health care. It’s rather interesting to see how it has come about. The discussions we’re having tonight have been taking place for several years, of the new ways in which medicine is being applied. I want us to remember that we’re talking about a fluid way in which our health care system is organizing itself. And successive governments have made attempts—whether they’ve been agreed upon by the opposition or not—but looking at how that has happened, we’ve discovered that with new innovation, equipment, materials, IT—that’s the technology piece—there have been actions by governments of all stripes to integrate

that into the health care system, adding to the costs of how we provide our health care.

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Successive governments have also done the second thing, which is to try to rein in the cost of providing those additions that we’ve been adding to the health care system. Successive governments have also done the removal of some of the services that have been provided by previous governments, and this government as well. So the fluid part of what we’re talking about tonight is the several years that have gone on to talk about what Bill 171 is leading us to.

That brings me to my final preamble into the bulk of the bill, and that is defining it as an omnibus bill. When I look at it, in terms of the translation, removing the translation—this omnibus bill that’s being gently and kindly labelled by the opposition, with French translation, is 140 pages. So it’s 70 pages of English in this bill. I’ve seen omnibus bills since 1999 of over 250 pages, over hundreds of pages of bills. Quite frankly, some of the omnibus bills that we’ve had to look through have included several ministries. Let me call this one a mini-omnibus bill. At least this one stays within the realm of health care, on the blanket or under the umbrella of health care. So am I excusing its being defined as an omnibus bill? No, I’m not. I’m not going to excuse it, because it does go into several bills in the health care system that are looking at being changed.

What does it talk about? It’s talking about the improvement of coordination of the critical ambulance care transfers. Somebody in the opposition was talking a little bit about the initiation, of their government looking at land ambulance and emergency response teams. Quite frankly, they were absolutely correct to indicate that. That’s part of that fluid point I was making, that we are moving forward to see if there are better ways to provide the service, if there are more effective and efficient ways to provide the service. In this bill, we’ve identified one, and that is the emergency response ambulance service that’s being looked at. It’s a little different and a little more unique than what was proposed by the previous government, but it’s an extension of what they started. So that’s a good thing, too.

Defibrillators—the very same process. They’ve been around for a long time. There has been training with defibrillators initiated by EMS, the emergency response system, the ambulance attendants and the paramedics, then moving into firefighters, who actually, in most cases, are first on scene. They’re moving into defibs. Now what we’ve learned is that—actually, if we go outside those doors, there’s a defibrillator right there, so we’ve got it in this public gallery. We’ve got it in ice arenas now.

I was lucky enough to go to my riding, and they did a big thing after that young man lost his life: Chase McEachern. His dad was there. I had a really nice chance to talk to his dad, and we talked to the NHL hockey player, Yuri—I can’t remember his last name, but Yuri almost lost his life—New York Rangers. At the bench

they actually had to revive him with a defib. He was there to talk about his experience, and a very moving moment was when he started to talk about what his experience was. The first thing that came to his mind was, "I'm not going to see my dad see me do well." That was really moving. I thought that told us more about him than it did about the defib. But he was there to defend it.

So to my colleague and friend Bruce Crozier, who introduced a private member's bill—and I know there's been a host of other private members' bills—I offer my thanks and congratulations for moving the sticks a little further and a little higher. I think that's what we're talking about, trying to take these pieces of legislation and move them forward.

I thank the opposition today for its kind and obvious—and I will accept it as a challenge because challenges are good. How they're provided and how they're delivered is the question.

I taught various levels and whenever I taught I talked about the newspaper, I talked about commercials, I talked about TV, and I always asked my students and their parents to view with critical eyes: "Listen to what you're hearing, see what you're seeing, and make sure that you hear what they're saying. Are they saying something constructive or are they saying something just to get attention?" So peel away.

The only thing I'm going to ask—this is a blood sport in this place, and it's out there to try to mark people up so that they can get elected to be here—I'm going to ask you, whenever we do it on this side or on that side, be the critical eye and hear what they're saying. Are they being partisan for the sake of being partisan because it's going to be an opportunity to give you a little scar and a markup and make you look bad in public, or are they offering you constructive criticism? That's the piece I was talking about when I was addressing the crowd before. What I am asking us to do in this place, as a continual reminder, is offer the constructive criticism, offer the challenges and indicate where it's coming from and why you're offering it. That, to me, is good legislation, good legislative debate and a good opportunity for us to put it all on the table.

If we don't do the amendment, it might be because there might be a different reason we're not accepting it. If it's partisan and it might be because it's the opposition offering it, then I don't think that's very smart either. What I think we should be doing is dissecting this bill and making it better.

I have already mentioned in my two-minuter that, yes, we actually have talked to people about the social workers and we made the correction. Even before the amendment came, we realized that that's not going to fly—put it in. Congratulations. We've done it. Thank you to those who have, in your letters in response, indicated to your constituents who want to know what's happening. For those who have done it, thank you for letting them know that it's being dealt with it. You can take credit that you sent in letters and e-mails and put some pressure on. That's what's going to happen, and that's what should be

happening, because you are the representative of that constituency. We do it here on this side; we ask our own government to assist in those ways. Those are good things to do.

The next piece we want to talk about is greater accountability in response to the Cory report. It's been indicated that there are some things that have happened. We haven't had a review of the MRC—the medical review committee—since 1972. That's when it came in. In 1972, the former Conservative government brought in the MRC to watch how OHIP money was being spent by our doctors in the medical profession.

We pointed out in opposition—I look at my friend from the other side; my good friend from Niagara. Peter Kormos and I spent an awful lot of time at various points dealing with the very sad case that took place. I won't mention it, other than to relive some pain, but the bottom line was that it was attributed to by some of the MRC. We on that side asked for a review, and we're now getting it.

The fact is that MRC is being restructured to try to be sensitive to some of the problems it had. That's fluid. That's another example of how things can be moved forward, how we can raise the bar, how we can move the sticks a little further out. That's a good way to do these things. I think we need to have committees. We need to have as much committee time as possible. We need to continue to bring these bills to committee, because we, in this place, don't have all the answers. There are more answers out there from the professions and from the grassroots. People who just experience the system are going to want to talk about this, and rightfully so. It's the largest investment we make in the entire government. Why shouldn't we spend a lot of time on Bill 171? Why shouldn't we spend some time? Why shouldn't we? It's about health care. It's about the provisions. As I have thought in the past and recommend now, we should always have a critical eye on this piece.

Better protecting and modernizing our regulated health professions, the new complaints and reports committee, increasing investigative time frames and improving communications: I've got a big list of things that the bill is attempting to do. If I were to go through them all, I wouldn't have enough time, but what I'm going to suggest is that by the time we're finished our debate on Bill 171 and sent it to committee, an awful lot of the points that are being made about what's right with this bill are going to be spoken of, and what's wrong with the bill is going to be spoken of.

I'm going to recommend that we can get an awful lot of work done in a very short period of time in committee, but we need to give it as much time as it needs to make it the best bill we possibly can. I think that's what our purpose should be: to make the best possible legislation we can as we move our fluid health care system forward.

There wasn't an MRI when I was young. I'm not telling you how old I am, but there wasn't an MRI when I was young. They were working on it, they were trying to figure out how to make one, but we didn't have one.

I want to end on a good note with the Minister of Health and thank him for the support he's given to my community in approving an MRI in the Brantford General Hospital. He approved an FHT, a family health team, in the riding of Brant—we're going to have that up and running soon—and a CHC, a community health centre, soon to be up and running in my community. The LHIN process that has been created, the local integrated health network, is another way in which we can decentralize a lot of the money and power of Queen's Park down to a point where at least more community participation is expected and analyzed.

Those are the types of things that I think Bill 171, in concert with the other items that we're talking about generically about what health care is all about, is going to bring us a better health care system in the long run.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I also ask for continued remarks and concerns that the opposition have about how the bill can be improved and what you've heard from your constituencies and offer us those amendments. I think we were told by the official opposition that they will be providing us with some amendments, and I absolutely heard from the critic that the NDP are going to offer some amendments as well. We look forward to that, and I look forward to having this spoken about in committee.

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The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): With regard to this bill, I'd say first of all that it's too bad it wasn't put out immediately after first reading on December 12, when it was introduced in this Legislature, and that perhaps we would have had hearings on this during the winter break. It's the kind of bill which, as the member has described, is omnibus in nature and therefore covers a number of different areas, and there are a whole lot of people in Ontario who would like to have a say about it. It's really hard for politicians in the Legislature to get a grasp of what all those interests may or may not be. Yes, we get letters and we get advice from our critics etc., but we don't hear it first-hand. My view is that this is going through the wrong process with regard to how we could proceed.

The other part about putting a bill out after first reading is that it doesn't engender the same kind of hostility to a constructive amendment during the process. The problem we have when a bill is introduced at second reading and then we go to committee is that the government is somewhat entrenched in its opinion with regard to making this or that amendment. I feel that this kind of bill would have been much better put out after first reading.

Secondly, I'd like to talk briefly about the fact that this government, getting close to an election, is really bringing in four new groups with a regard to becoming regulated health care professions. It's really late in the day, and one has to be a little bit suspicious that perhaps this is a sop prior to the provincial election.

Lastly, this bill is to promote greater accountability amongst our physicians in Ontario. I thought we were

trying to attract physicians to Ontario, attract physicians to work longer and to be more friendly to our system. Why not deal with the concerns we have recognized in the public accounts committee with regard to some of the patient problems around the misuse of our health care system? Why not lay off the doctors for a little while? We need them.

Mr. Marchese: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Brant; however, I do want to raise another issue that I didn't get a chance to speak to. I'm not sure he would necessarily have the answer to it, but if he does it would be helpful.

Schedule F: There are a number of amendments in this particular section. Subsections 29(1) and (2) are amended to allow reporting by medical officers of health to health facilities with respect to communicable diseases that are acquired at facilities and to allow for the issuance of orders against either institutions or public hospitals in order to deal with these communicable diseases.

What is useful to remember—the member from Nickel Belt raised this, and I want to raise it again—is that this reporting mechanism that the Globe and Mail referred to a while ago, mistakenly, because the Globe and Mail said, “Starting in January 2008, the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation will compel ... all acute-care hospitals—in addition to those nursing homes and other institutions seeking a stamp of approval—to provide the rates of MRSA”—an acronym that I don't know what it stands for; one of these bugs that I'm sure is a long, difficult bug—or “C. difficile,” which sounds beautiful. I don't know how others pronounce “difficile,” but it certainly makes sense to me. It's a “difficult” bug; that's for sure.

The member from Nickel Belt said it's important to know that this reporting mechanism to the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation is voluntary. There's nothing mandatory about it. I just want to remind the member from Brant that in Manitoba and Quebec, the provincial bodies, hospitals, etc., are compelled to report that to public health agencies. I'm wondering whether the member from Brant thinks that's a good thing and whether they might look at that by way of amendments.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I'm glad to enter into the debate with my good friend the member from Brant. I preface my remarks just to say that I disagree with the member from Lanark–Carleton, who characterized this bill as somewhat of a sop to some new regulated professions. I would disagree. I know that many of the people in those professions have come to us, and I think this is a natural evolution of our health care system.

I think about the conversation I had with my new good friend the member from Markham, our new Minister of Revenue. He talked about how very important the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act was for the community, because it provided a recognition.

I want to talk about two other parts of this part of the act that deal with naturopaths and homeopaths. I think we wanted to ensure that naturopaths continued to be able to

practise to the same scope as they currently do under the Drugless Practitioners Act. The Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council recommended that naturopaths and homeopaths should have a joint college; that on their own there weren't enough members to really justify two colleges. We have a very good precedent in the province of Ontario, and that deals with the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists. They're not two separate colleges. They come together and they jointly regulate their professions, and I think that's a good model.

I commend the minister for doing the same thing for naturopaths and homeopaths: bringing them together under one college. I know that they have been coming to Queen's Park for many, many years now, longer than I've been here, saying that they felt that their professions needed to be recognized in this way. So we're proud of that. They're part of the team that is the vision behind our Minister of Health, of family health teams and community health centres, all inspired by the work of Roy Romanow, about how we need to make sure that people are using the full value of the scope of their profession by working in unity with others. That's a far cry from what it was many years ago.

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Bill 171. There were a number of issues brought forward by a number of members.

I know the member from Chatham-Kent Essex mentioned the complaints process taking place there. I think that when you're dealing with a complaints process, you want to make sure that it's understood and it's streamlined so the outcome is understood before getting into the process, and having it be clear and defined and having an eventual outcome that people can work toward is very important as well.

Also, the member from Perth-Middlesex mentioned the natural progression in the addition of the new disciplines, I guess we'll call them. I think the concern there is that when any one of these new disciplines comes forward and is listed and regulated, an expectation of remuneration also eventually comes forward. I see the minister shaking his head, because he hears those same things that we hear on a regular basis about this very issue: that eventually, yes, they're going to want to be compensated, as we are starting to set the guidelines.

There are some good points and bad points when dealing with some of these new disciplines. I think that in today's society, we want it all right now and we want it over the counter, and a lot of self-analysis takes place, along with the medication that goes along with that, but the individuals don't have the experience and the knowledge. I wonder what's going to happen with the regulations regarding those over-the-counter medications that people take, all the natural herbal medications that people take because they have a cold or they don't have something else, and how it's going to all play out, because it's going to take quite a while to ensure that the natural progression of these things all work for the best benefit of our society.

I know that we want to move forward on a lot of issues. I want to briefly discuss the defibrillators as well. I coach kids' hockey, and I'm there at the rink all the time, and the opportunity to have these in the facilities is greatly needed. The only thing that needs to go along with it is the training to make sure that all the individuals—because they see that sign there, they know where it is, but the first person who's going to jump up to deal with it if there's not a health care professional in the area will be somebody like myself: a coach, a manager or a trainer.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Brant.

Mr. Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to do the wrap-up. Thank you to the members from Lanark-Carleton, Trinity-Spadina, Perth-Middlesex, and Oshawa.

Let me jump right into the member from Oshawa's issue. What also came about as a result of the announcement was that several private sectors came forward and paid for the training on top of the purchase of the defibrillators, so every single one of our arenas in Brantford is now going to have trained staff on-site on a regular basis. Quite frankly, I think he's right that we have to take a look at that aspect of it, but I think we can form the partnerships, and I hope he understands that's what I'm asking for. It doesn't always have to be the government. It can be the private sector jumping in and making that approach.

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Thank you to the member for Perth-Middlesex for using the words "natural progression" and "fluid comments," because what we're talking about is the natural, fluid progression as we move forward with our health care system. That's the point I was making. We are naturally going to be looking at all the different opportunities and areas that we now have and, quite frankly, the new ways in which some of us can take care of our bodies and ourselves for ourselves, applying to what culturally I understand. This is a multicultural province; let's be real. That is, we now need to open our minds to a 2,000-year-old piece of medicine that's been around and we know has been effective and useful, and we're going to find the same thing with natural herbs and spices and everything else that's out there. I do agree with the member from Oshawa: It has to be done safely, and I think they are also saying the same thing.

The member from Trinity-Spadina, very quickly: How we address the issue he brought up is the natural, fluid process that I talked about in my preamble, about how we move forward with our bills, how we correct bills, how we move them forward, how we review them every 10 or so years or even sooner than that and find out where the other flaws are, not just in the short time that we sometimes are given in terms of reviewing these bills.

Finally, the member from Lanark-Carleton: We won't be doing those things any more than the opposition will be doing them, leading up to an election. There's no electioneering going on around here, that's for darn sure.

The Acting Speaker: Before I call further debate, for those who may be interested, the election in Quebec is really something else. The ADQ is ahead.

Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): It's my pleasure to be able to join in the debate on Bill 171 this evening. I found it interesting that a couple of the members referred to this as an omnibus bill and there was some question as to whether that was really the definition, so we came up with the middle of the road, making it a mini one. However, I think that the issue is more the question of the complexity of the bill, the fact that it deals with 42 separate acts. I think it's probably in that context that people recognize the enormity of the bill, regardless of the number of pages it requires. Having 42 separate acts means, then, that people are going to be looking at the merit of part of the bill and perhaps see that in a more favourable light than another part. So then you have the complexity of supporting it, but obviously not being happy about a particular aspect of it.

The other thing, of course, I think that speakers have recognized is the timing of the bill, having it as late in the term as this spring. We certainly want to see that there are public hearings. While the bill has obviously had a number of studies behind it—the HPRAC New Directions document, the Spring of Fear and the Cory report all have provided, in a variety of ways, opportunities for this bill to come forward—nevertheless, I would argue that it certainly requires and deserves some public scrutiny through the process of public hearings.

I want to comment briefly in the time that I have available on a couple of the areas of the bill that I think just deserve a little bit of particular attention. On schedule A, with the air ambulance critical care transfers, I thought it was interesting that it was in the bill, because certainly in the auditor's report from 2006 there was a study done of the land and air ambulance and the complexities that are encountered in providing the best service at a reasonable cost and, frankly, to provide the most efficient service for the people of Ontario wherever they live, so obviously this is represented in schedule A.

In schedule F, certainly it's a concern that we continue to have a shortage—in fact, a dire shortage—of medical officers of health. I think that this will continue to hamper efforts in the direction of developing public health guidelines. It seems to me that in the era in which we live, issues like SARS, issues like C. difficile, issues around global influences on people's health will only continue to be more and more complex and increase in that complexity, so certainly, I think, a warning to the government that it's very important to maintain that level of staffing.

In schedule K, there's some reference made to the creation of the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Agency. I think it's important to draw attention to the fact that the recommended structure, according to the commission, fails to take into account the major SARS problem of divided authority and accountability. An important lesson from SARS is that the last thing Ontario

needs, in planning for the next outbreak and to deal with it when it happens, is another major independent player on the block. SARS demonstrated the dangers of such uncoordinated activities. I think the point here is that you do need one person in charge and you do need to provide that person with the authority to be able to operate in a provincially global perspective. I think this is something the government needs to consider.

The other area that I'd like to speak about, as a number of speakers have talked about, is schedule N with regard to the defibrillators. I think that including in the proposed legislation some protection for individuals from liability is essential. We live in a very litigious world, and certainly somebody is going to stand there and think twice if they feel they are at some risk.

In schedule P, the kind of new direction in looking at regulation for naturopaths and homeopaths I think is an important step forward. I would agree with those who feel that in the public mind there should be perhaps a clearer distinction, since these are quite different practices. But it seems to me that through the provisions of this legislation there seems to be general agreement about the appropriateness of having a college which would serve both. However, I would just caution that people need to understand that they certainly aren't the same kind of practitioner and shouldn't be confused just because they share that. So that will become part of the responsibility, obviously, of the naturopaths and the homeopaths, making that distinction for the general public, and at the same time raising awareness of the particular opportunities that those two areas provide for a kind of medicine that many people appreciate and I think will come to understand as of greater and greater value.

I want to take the remaining moment to speak to the issue of the psychotherapists, because in fairness to our constituents who were naturally extremely upset when the bill was first presented, we owe them the recognition that their efforts were not unnoticed and were not unheeded. Certainly, I think they should take comfort from the fact that by contacting us and by making clear their position, they provided all of us with an opportunity to be able to respond. And as we know, the Minister of Health has indicated that there will be adjustments made to include the social workers.

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I want to call attention to, in my riding, Heather McKechnie, who runs a counselling service and was certainly one of those many people, as social workers, who were extremely upset. She outlined, I think in a very positive way, the kind of contribution that she and other social workers make. She says in her letter to me, "The exclusion of social workers from the Psychotherapy Act represents an unjustifiable downgrading of the profession's role in the provision of clinical services which require a high degree of knowledge and skill." I think, particularly in a world where mental health services are extremely valuable and necessary and in short supply, that it's very, very important that the message that people like Heather McKechnie gave has not gone unheeded.

We look forward to the amendments that the minister has offered. I think it speaks, quite frankly, to the value of having these kinds of opportunities to bring forward the concerns of our constituents. So I would congratulate Ms. McKechnie on her decision. Obviously, she and many others made it clear to the government that change, amendment, was necessary.

Ms. DiNovo: I don't think the House really got the sense of humour exhibited by our member from York North when she called this a minibus bill and not an omnibus bill. So just for the record, in case people missed that *bon mot*, it was a good one.

Just to answer the member from Brant, as he raised some concerns, I think this is exactly the problem with the minibus bill, that this section that so many members have spoken about, which deals with the potential liability of those who use these portable defibrillators—and of course we need them. It's interesting that one is just outside this chamber, because I wonder how many of us know how to use it. Again, the devil is in the details. We need funding and implementation and training to be able to use these implements.

But also, here is a section of this bill that needs to be enacted sooner rather than later. No one here has a problem with it, except perhaps wanting to see it implemented quickly and well. It needs to go forward, whereas other sections of this bill do need amendments, do need to engage others, do need to have hearings associated with them. So we're going to slow down something that could be potentially life-saving because of other issues that are dealt with in other schedules of this bill. That is the problem here, and I think that's what we've been raising, again, not because it's 140 pages but because it covers 17 different schedules and 42 different acts. We'd like to see those acts that save people's lives quickly enacted and those that need some fine tuning given their due process. That's the trouble with lumping all of this together, and that's what we're up against and our frustration when we're dealing with it.

Having said that, certainly the Cory report provides some of the basis for some of the schedules in this, just to say that everyone, even doctors, is innocent until proven guilty. I'll go into that a little bit more in my time.

Mr. Wilkinson: I just wanted to re-enter the debate. My friend from Oshawa was talking about defibrillators. I just want to recount to the House that I was at the 75th anniversary of the St. John Ambulance branch in Stratford, Ontario, my hometown. It was a wonderful event. They had a demonstration of the latest in technology in defibrillators.

Of course, people remember that if you have a heart attack, what happens is that your heart, which is a muscle which beats regularly when we're healthy, goes into a period of having these very small, rapid contractions, and that will lead to death. What happens is that the heart needs to be shocked back into a normal rhythm.

Our bill is all about making sure that if there is a defibrillator, a person in good faith, as a good Samaritan, can come and help save that person's life. But I, like

anybody else, would fear using this electrical piece of equipment in that situation. We saw a demonstration in Stratford, put on by St. John Ambulance, of the latest type of high-tech defibrillators. It's interesting: When you open it, it begins to speak to you. It actually tells you and gives you instructions on exactly what to do, and on it, it has pictures of a person's chest. There are two pads, and on the pad itself it shows you exactly where to put the pad on the person and explains that to you. If you don't make sufficient contact, it's a very smart machine. It actually tells you that you have it in the wrong place, that you need to reapply it. Then the machine itself diagnoses whether or not the electrical shock is required, so it will not give a shock to a person if they do not require it. Because of the technology, the computer chips that are in it, it does that. It tells you exactly what to do.

So I think it is that ability for us to use the latest in technology so that people can use this even if they haven't got training, because we're using the latest in technology to save lives.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'd like to add some comments to the speech by the member from York North on Bill 171, the health systems bill. I have been using the time this evening to read some of the local newspapers from my riding, and I note that all the letters to the editor seem to be on health issues. One is very much related to this topic. It's from the past CEO of Algonquin Health Services in Huntsville, writing about our current challenge in the riding. The article is titled "Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare Needs Support of the Province." I just want to highlight a few of the comments from the past CEO. I'll just quote her: "Letters printed in your recent editions indicate concern over the possibility of losing essential health care programs, namely laboratory services."

I'll go further down in the article: "The province has been expecting the impossible from board members and administrators for many years. They are expected to ensure that all required services are in place despite the fact that budget allotments do not keep pace with wage, service, equipment and technology cost inflation."

Going further down the article: "MAHC is one of the few organizations in the province with a common governance and administrative structure encompassing home care, nursing home and hospital services. Muskoka is a pioneer with respect to health service integration...."

"Maintaining the full spectrum of laboratory services is a fundamental requirement as part of an integrated system. Unfortunately, local initiative is being sacrificed to serve a provincial and regional plan with little local flexibility."

"The province is not allowing the required time for MAHC to realize the economic benefits of its reorganization...."

Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare "should be supported in all attempts to maintain an integrated health care system, including a full spectrum of laboratory and home care services. The system in Muskoka could be a model for the rest of the province."

That's written by Vaughn Adamson, who's the past CEO of Algonquin health care. I hope the government and the minister are listening. I'd be happy to send the full article over to the minister, which provides some very good insight into the situation in Muskoka.

Mr. Ouellette: On the bill, I started just briefly speaking about the defibrillators, and I wanted to go on a little bit about that. In the time since I last spoke, I've already initiated a defibrillator course for all the coaching staff and training staff in Oshawa. That's the power of technology, that we can do those sorts of things as members. It's not just about what you can do and what you can bring to the Legislature; it's how you can enact it in your own communities that makes that difference. The ability to do that in our ridings is important, to have that training get out there.

The government whip was over and explained that some of the new technologies out there actually speak to you while you're going through this process, and how important that is. I think those are some of the key things. We have all this legislation, and our ability as members is to get it out in the ridings to make a difference.

Also, the vastness of the bill: Hopefully, the committee process will give enough time for each of the disciplines and those presenters who want to come forward. I know there's going to be a large response, I expect from some groups, anyway. We're getting close to an election, and quite possibly they may be reluctant to come forward. However, whether it's the dental hygienists or the homeopaths or all the other groups who are mentioned in there, it's the ability to come forward and say a couple of things: the changes they need and how it's going to impact them, and, quite frankly, as a natural progression—and I think we'll stick with that kind of mind frame for a little bit—takes place, how it will evolve in their specific discipline and what the expectations are in the future.

Obviously, the costs in health care are growing. I don't know if any government will ever be able to fill those demands that are out there, but certainly an expectation of how we can move forward in using all these disciplines because, quite frankly, there's a lot of infighting between all these groups and organizations and disciplines throughout the province, and the ability to move forward and how it's going to be in the best interests of the province at committee would be a great way to do it.

I'll end early. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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The Acting Speaker: The member for York North.

Mrs. Munro: Thank you to the speakers, the members from Parkdale-High Park, Perth-Middlesex, Parry Sound-Muskoka and Oshawa.

I think there was a plot to require that I say more accurately this time "defibrillators," because I stumbled over it the last time. I have listened to all of you then make references to them and I've been sitting here thinking, "Okay, can I do it this time?"

Anyway, I think that discussion that was shared amongst you is probably a demonstration of the point I

made at the very beginning of my speech, which is the fact that while the bill is complex, it reflects the nature of health care in the sense that it must move on and that there has to be a recognition of new methods, new issues, new organizations, and in this particular case, the conversation around new mechanisms. I think the fact that we're able then to hear about the way in which in our own ridings we are able to move forward on defibrillators is simply a demonstration of the fact that the face of health care is changing, as well as the technology.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to reiterate, because I know the member from Brant was out of the room, that the only concern we had about what the member from York North called, amusingly, the minibus bill is that we would love to see sections like this section, schedule N, move forward very quickly and to put these defibrillators into every community centre, school and college that we can get them into. I'm delighted that they speak to us and tell us how to use them, because certainly that will help with the implementation of such devices. So we'd like to see that move very quickly forward, and I think, again, we have pretty well universal agreement on that.

The problem is that that is part of a larger bill, and some of the other sections of this larger bill do need hearings, do need to hear from stakeholders, do need committee time, do need some amendments, as has been extensively discussed tonight. I feel somewhat saddened that we have to slow down that one schedule, schedule N, to help accommodate the other schedules. So that's the only concern there.

I wanted to pick up where I left off, in part with the Cory report, because you've heard it alluded to but I don't think we've heard from it—this is from the Toronto Star, an article back in 2005—and just again to highlight one of the heroes we've talked about, Chase McEachern, who really inspired that schedule N, this young boy who was 12 years old.

This is a doctor, Anthony Hsu of Welland, and I quote from a colleague of ours, Mr. Kormos from Niagara Centre, who said, "The sacrifice of Dr. Hsu, the courage and strength of his widow, Irene Hsu, are to be credited for what we have now that is an acknowledgement by Justice Cory the (committee) had a debilitating effect on physicians and their ability to practise medicine." This was the auditing process. "I'm hopeful now the government will adopt those recommendations," the Cory recommendations, "in collaboration with doctors."

Among 118 recommendations that Justice Cory suggested was this in a sense overriding one: "Introducing rules of natural justice—as apply to all Canadian courts—to the audit process. Hearings should be impartial, doctors should be represented by counsel and the onus should be on the ministry to prove impropriety, rather than on the doctor to prove otherwise"—in other words that doctors, just like everyone else, are innocent until proven guilty.

This part of Bill 171, of course, attempts to address that, and I think we should applaud that part of it.

I want to talk about schedule Q. We have spoken briefly about that. We have spoken about the fact that we heard from a number of stakeholders, primarily among them social workers, and an amendment seems to be in the offing. Of course, it's not in the bill yet, so again, in the offing. That's wonderful. We would like to see the actual amendment in front of our faces. We'd like to hear that amendment.

we understand that with these regulatory colleges, not everything can be made an amendment. I mean they're regulatory colleges for a reason, that they are actually going to introduce and develop regulations around their own professions.

Having said that, I'd just like to flag some concerns that we've heard from stakeholders and that I've certainly heard from constituents. One of them is very typical, I think. It was from a wonderful psychotherapist who runs her own institute, the Life Space Institute. She trains psychotherapists, and she has a doctorate herself, as well as an M.A. and a B.Sc. But she raises this issue—it's in a sense a grandmother clause—of those who have been practising psychotherapy for decades. We came across this with the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act as well. People who have been out there and have had decades of clinical experience and who might, for example, lack that Ph.D., or even that M.A. at times, but have had the concomitant experience certainly should be acknowledged. We would hate to see them be regulated out of existence, partly because there simply aren't enough doctorates in psychology and psychiatry to go around. You've heard the statistic this evening that one in five people in Ontario suffers from mental illness or has suffered from mental illness at some point in their lives—certainly I think the number of those who seek counsel is probably higher—and we in the New Democratic Party would like to be able to make sure that everyone in Ontario actually has someone to go to.

Another group that also contacted me because of my background in pastoral care were those who provide pastoral care. These are the nuns, the priests, the ministers, many of whom have advanced degrees in pastoral care counselling, which is, again, another division of care and counsel that is given to Ontarians, whom we would hate to see regulated out of existence. So another flag should go out for them.

Of course, we've heard over and over again about social workers, but I think, for the people at home, sometimes they don't realize exactly how well trained our social workers are. I'll read into the record a letter I received from another constituent and stakeholder, Anthony Wilson. He says he's a 57-year-old master of social work from Wilfrid Laurier in the private practice of psychotherapy and has been a full-time clinical social work psychotherapist for 20 years—a clinician in inpatient and outpatient psychiatry departments at two Toronto general hospitals; has done advanced psychotherapy training, countless supervision hours, confer-

ences and workshops over the years; began a small private practice in 1977, again, experience in individual, group and couple psychotherapy. This is what our social workers are doing. Now, they're doing it in every institution we can imagine, and certainly we would hate to see their activity curtailed or circumvented or regulated out of existence in any way.

Then I wanted to spend the few minutes remaining for those who perhaps aren't covered by this bill. These are flags for perhaps future consideration, schedule B amendments concerning health professions. I note here that this government has failed to use this bill to respond to legislative and regulatory changes that nurses have been asking for, such as the addition of new controlled acts to the Nursing Act, 1991. By the way, in terms of controlled acts, we have also heard from our homeopathic institutes about controlled acts. This act does not speak to them, although they are in support of Bill 171. I would hope that when the college is set up, this is a chance for further discussion or perhaps an amendment in hearings that would allow homeopaths to maybe practise some of those controlled acts.

At any rate, to get back to the nurses: For example, prescribing a drug or setting or casting a fracture of a bone or dislocation of a joint is what our nurses are asking to be able to do; expansion of existing controlled acts—ordering and the application of energy, diagnostic testing, for example. So again a flag, just that we in the New Democratic Party want Ontarians to have the best possible care. We do have these practitioners out there and we want to allow them to practise to the full extent of their ability: nurses, homeopaths, social workers and those with years and years of clinical experience who perhaps might not be up to date in their academic experience.

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I mentioned the Ontario Homeopathic Association, or should have, and also the Ontario College of Homeopathic Medicine. I understand that they are currently, even today, meeting with the Minister of Health, so I'm hoping that comes to fruition and that their needs are heard.

Finally, two others: I received a letter from registered dietitians who are concerned about their salaries, and also from nurses in some of our community health care centres who are not paid the same as nurses elsewhere. There seems to be some disparity in pay nurse to nurse, and certainly there's a disparity in pay between nurse practitioners and dietitians, to the point that it is very difficult to even find or hire or place dietitians. So I raise those flags for consideration. I hope those groups as well are included in the hearings, are able to make perhaps some amendments; if not, certainly to be heard when it comes time for these regulatory bodies to set up and to begin discussing what regulations and who will be covered by the regulations.

Just to wrap up, again, we'd love to see certain sections of this bill go forward quickly, post-haste. The Heart and Stroke Foundation would love to see, for

example, a Chase McEachern schedule enacted ASAP. On the other hand, we would love to see some hearings and due process and amendments and perhaps flags for regulations brought before the committee so that everybody has their due say about other sections of this huge Bill 171. We hope in that way to make this a stronger and better piece of legislation.

I look forward to hearing what other members of the House have to say.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Fonseca: I'm glad that the member for Parkdale—High Park brought up the Cory report and the 118 recommendations that he brought forward in terms of improving the billing review process for our doctors. This piece of legislation is about strengthening Ontario's health care system, promoting greater access, accountability, better protection for patients, promoting public health.

Why are we doing this? We're doing this to make the Ontario health care system second to none. We're doing it because we are in a global, competitive world that is trying to attract health human resources. We want to make sure that optometrists, doctors, social workers, homeopaths, traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, doctors, naturopaths, kinesiologists, public health workers—I could go on and on—can look to Ontario and say, "You know what? That's where I want to go. That's where I want to practise. That is the best place in the world for me to be."

What the changes mean to Ontarians are increased infectious disease management, control and emergency preparedness, something that we know we desperately need after experiencing SARS, through reforms of our public Health Protection and Promotion Act; more effective health service provision through a centrally operated air and land ambulance system, which we talked about today; Chase McEachern and defibrillators, providing civil liability protection so that users of portable heart defibrillator machines and owners who make defibrillators available on their premises—making sure we get rid of those barriers, making sure that they are available in our arenas, in this Legislature, in shopping malls, wherever people may be, because we know they can have a huge impact on saving somebody's life.

Mr. Sterling: It sounds good, from the former speaker and the speakers in general, but the big problem here is that the focus is in the wrong place. As we found in the public accounts committee, the problem with the health care system is more related to the misuse of the red and white health card. There are a lot of people who are not residents of this province who are getting medical health care in this province. The auditor showed that there were health cards being used up and down our borders in the same day in communities that were miles and miles apart.

So what does the Ministry of Health do instead of concentrating on the misuse of our health care system by people who are not entitled to use our system? What did they do when asked in the legislative committee, "Are

you concerned about this, Ministry of Health? What have you done about the misuse of the health card?" They said, "Nothing." Nobody's been charged. Even though there are five million of these cards out there, there's no concern by the Liberal government over there.

What are they concerned about? They're concerned about a physician making a mistake on their billing, so what they're going to do now under this bill is make it even tougher on our physicians to practise. They're going to make them go through more paperwork. They're going to have more "accountability" on our physicians and our health care workers. I thought we wanted to make this a more friendly place for physicians to practise.

So what does this government do? It concentrates on the wrong group in terms of improving our health care system. Instead of concentrating on the abuse at the patient level by non-residents using our health care system, they're concentrating on the physicians and the health care providers and making it tougher for them to practise in our province—wrong-headed.

Mr. Levac: Up to this point, we were doing pretty well without trying to blame this particular government for all the ills. But it had to happen, so let me defend it, let me respond to the member from Lanark—Carleton.

The MRC problem was pointed out to your previous government sitting over here, when all of these other problems were being pointed out about how the doctors were being said to be guilty before they were proven innocent. That's the government legacy that we had with the MRC here from 1972. He's also talking about OHIP card fraud. Unfortunately, it was pointed out to the government by the opposition when they were in government, so they've got a handle on opposition: "Blame them. It's their fault. They don't take responsibility for anything."

Let me speak specifically to the member's 10-minute speech. In her 10-minute speech, she talked about exactly what I said we were doing at this particular moment, which is to talk about offering the solutions and offering. I think you called them flags, how one might proceed with the rest of the bill. Those are accepted. Those are notes. Those are things that I think we need to bring forward in committee and explain why those changes are necessary and why that particular group would be affected, if it's not just the individual patient themselves or the group that's providing those services—what tweaks, what changes could be made to make it a better bill. That's what I like to hear. I like to hear that stuff.

But what we're hearing now is the member from Lanark—Carleton, who previously said, in his other two-minuter, "Oh, there's no politics being played here." Of course there is, and unfortunately we're missing the point about how to improve it.

It's a fluid system. There need to be continuous changes, continuous improvements. Is one government going to catch it all and save the day? Not unless you're looking at it through the eyes of the member from Lanark—Carleton, who thinks that their government and

their party is the only one that ever had answers, and they're always right. Unfortunately, this time he's wrong.

Mr. Miller: Certainly, the member from Parkdale-High Park had some interesting comments to make on Bill 171. The member from Mississauga East talked about strengthening health care. I want to once again refer to the articles in many of the papers in Parry Sound-Muskoka about the challenges facing Muskoka and Parry Sound, Burks Falls, Huntsville and the Bracebridge area, particularly the article written by Vaughn Adamson, who is the past CEO of Algonquin health care. She also notes the challenges being faced with the regionalization of health care as proposed by this government, the new local health integration networks. I'll quote:

"The industry is also faced with the challenge of regionalization of health services. The province has defined our region. It includes all of Simcoe county and Muskoka but excludes East Parry Sound, an area long connected to north Muskoka through common services, facilities and practitioners. Muskoka and East Parry Sound is a logical cluster within the designated region and should be recognized as such. Within the cluster, health service integration should be encouraged, but it's not. The province's inflexible model of regionalization has now created a context within which continued integration of services at the local level is virtually impossible, although many would argue that it is the preferred approach."

She is pointing out, correctly, that East Parry Sound is not part of the LHIN that has traditionally been serviced by Algonquin Health Services prior to Muskoka Algonquin health services, and this doesn't make a lot of sense. She also points out that we have a model for rural Ontario. She's talking about the Muskoka side of the riding but it's also true on the Parry Sound side where we have the long-term-care, home care, nursing stations and ambulance all under one governance model covering quite a large region. I hope the government doesn't mess up that arrangement, which is quite integrated.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Parkdale-High Park has two minutes in which to respond.

Ms. DiNovo: Just to summarize, first of all, I want to acknowledge the incredible amount of work done by Ms. Martel from Nickel Belt. It's certainly work that my colleague from Trinity-Spadina, Rosario Marchese, and I have drawn on tonight.

Just to reiterate what I was saying, we would love to see the Chase McEachern Act go quickly ahead. I know the Heart and Stroke Foundation is really waiting patiently for the money to be able to enact what they want to do with defibrillators, and we would love to see that happen.

At the same time, we would love to see some real hearings happen and we'd like to see in writing the amendment that we've all been talking about that I know has been promised about social workers. Also, we'd like to see something about grandmothering clauses for those who have had lots of years of social work.

Raised concerns are in schedules F and G. Some of the concerns there in terms of transparency and accountability I hope are taken to heart.

I want to thank also the members from Parry Sound-Muskoka, Mississauga East, Lanark-Carleton and Brant.

Finally, an overriding concern, as this bill moves forward through committee and is finally enacted, is that the finances are there to make sure that it is implemented well and that the implementation procedures are also there, because that also would be a devil in the details if that doesn't happen.

Again, it's been a pleasure to speak and to carry forward the voices of sheroes and heroes, as I've said before, of those whose names and stories are really part and parcel of the experience that's part of this bill. It speaks to health care providers across Ontario. It speaks also, we hope, to an Ontario where health care is more easily accessible and where all the consumers of health care are protected.

The Acting Speaker: The time now being after 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

The House adjourned at 2132.

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Tuesday 27 March 2007

Mardi 27 mars 2007



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 27 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 27 mars 2007

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Today I rise to ask who is running the province of Ontario. Over and over we have seen Dalton McGuinty asleep on the job, denying problems exist until the Ombudsman catches him with his hand in the cookie jar. Then he is suddenly shocked that a problem exists and promises he will implement all the recommendations.

Despite the calls from homeowners, Dalton McGuinty did nothing about property tax assessment until the Ombudsman released his report.

Despite complaints from victims, Dalton McGuinty did nothing about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board until the Ombudsman released his report.

Despite questions in this House, the Fifth Estate and articles in every paper in Ontario, Dalton McGuinty denied there was a problem at the OLG. The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal promised that everything was fine. The people of Ontario went on spending their hard-earned money on lottery tickets, believing that everything was fair.

Once again, the Ombudsman seems to care more about the people of Ontario than this government does. He investigated. He found the problem. He came up with recommendations. And suddenly, now that he got caught, the minister recognizes that there is a problem at the OLG. He is trying to blame it on everyone else, but the truth is that he is the minister, he is the one responsible, he is the one who got caught covering up the problem. He is the one who should take the blame, and this time an apology isn't enough.

SOUTHSIDE SHUFFLE

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): I rise today to give credit to festivals that add so much to the fabric of our communities. I wish to speak about the Southside Shuffle in Mississauga South. It occurs every weekend after Labour Day. We bring in some of the best blues and jazz talent from all over North America. People travel from all over the United States to come to Port Credit, in the heart of south Mississauga, to listen to fantastic blues and jazz.

Three years ago, we formed a special gala committee to raise money for local charities, and last year we were able to donate \$40,000 to five local charities in Mississauga South as a great contribution to our community.

The Southside Shuffle was founded by Chuck Jackson of the Downchild Blues Band and is now in its eighth season of great prosperity and great economic development in the town of Port Credit in the heart of Mississauga South.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): Lottery is a game of trust which has been broken as the McGuinty government stood by while the lotteries were fixed. This \$100-million-plus taxpayer rip-off was ignored by the OLG, according to the Ombudsman's March 2007 report.

The McGuinty government was not only asleep at the switch but used its government majority on the standing committee on government agencies on November 29, 2006, to defeat my motion to recall the OLG to appear before the committee to answer to issues reported on the CBC on matters of public trust in the OLG's operation.

I wrote the dissenting opinion for the official opposition party to the OLG report, which was a whitewash report by the government. The McGuinty Liberals, by shutting down the government agencies committee review of the OLG, not only endorsed the scratch-and-lose rip-off of hard-working, law-abiding Ontarians, but by their actions have undermined the public trust in lotteries and condoned the theft of millions of dollars that could have been used to provide better health care and improve our communities through Trillium grants.

We Ontarians deserve better and more ethical government.

YOUTH BOCCÉ CANADA TOURNAMENT

Mr. Paul Ferreira (York South-Weston): This past Friday I had the distinct privilege of attending the 14th annual Youth Bocce Canada tournament for athletes with disabilities. The tournament took place in my riding and featured 24 teams of five athletes each who demonstrated the true meaning of good sportsmanship.

At the end of the tournament, eight of the teams were presented with championship trophies. However, it was

very clear that all of the athletes were champions. I was delighted to be called upon to hand out one of the trophies and present participation medals to a number of the athletes, who were accompanied by proud parents and teachers.

In addition to the competition, the tournament featured the crowning of a very special young woman named Angelia Nolis as Miss Youth Bocce Canada.

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The growing success of Youth Bocce Canada can be attributed to the tireless effort and dedication of its many volunteers, especially the president, Lee Prioriello. Lee founded the organization in 1994, and has seen his passion grow to the point where it now supports more than 350 athletes across the GTA. Youth Bocce Canada is an associate partner of Special Olympics Ontario. Its athletes have competed internationally at the highest levels of the Special Olympics movement. I ask all members of this House to join me in saluting Youth Bocce Canada for the invaluable contribution it is making in enriching the lives of young people with disabilities.

GTA POOLING

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Goodbye, GTA pooling. Mississauga won't miss you. Greater Toronto area pooling was a Mike Harris Tory creation to offset the costs of amalgamating the city of Toronto. By 2006, Peel region had paid approximately \$544 million into GTA pooling and got nothing. In the 2006 fiscal year alone, Peel region sent \$62 million to the pooling fund, some \$40 million of that from the pockets of Mississauga taxpayers. To cover some of this lost revenue and maintain Mississauga's historically balanced budget, Mississauga taxpayers had to raise their property tax rates higher than Toronto's, whose property taxes are subsidized from our GTA pooling money.

Last week's Ontario budget will put an end to this regressive Conservative tax, and it enables revenues generated in the 905 region to address 905 region needs. For 2007, GTA pooling contributions will be rolled back to 2004 levels. For each of the next six years, pooling costs will be reduced by one sixth of the 2004 levels until the program is fully eliminated in 2013. Mississauga's labour shortage results in some 60,000 more people per day commuting into our city than commuting out. The \$40 million recovered annually from this Mike Harris Tory legacy tax will address our big-city issues and build the city of Mississauga.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Today Premier McGuinty is visiting Peterborough and Cobourg to talk about his latest budget. Instead of bragging about yet another document filled with promises to be broken, perhaps he should be explaining to the good people of Peterborough and Cobourg why he left a mess at the

Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. before getting out of Dodge. Perhaps the Premier during his travels today will meet some hard-working, tax-paying people who purchased lottery tickets. I sincerely hope he'll be able to look them straight in the eye and tell them why he could not show the leadership expected from a Premier to help restore faith in Ontario's failed lottery system.

The Premier says the opposition is being partisan with this issue. Premier, tell that to the people of Peterborough and Cobourg who could have been cheated out of their lottery winnings because of your lack of leadership and your sweeping-under-the-carpet tactics. The Premier is no doubt hoping that David Caplan, the minister responsible for OLG, will clean up the mess. We know that the minister had months to fix the problem but waited to get his marching orders from the Ombudsman rather than from his real boss, Dalton McGuinty. Ontarians should ask themselves, "If the Ombudsman had not intervened, for how long would David Caplan allow the litany of problems to continue?"

I say to the minister that you can run, but you can't hide from taking the blame for the OLG. The Premier has left you here at Queen's Park today to fend for yourself and put your head on the chopping block.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I would like to congratulate the Premier and Minister Sorbara for delivering a successful budget last week, one that continues to prioritize children, education, health care and infrastructure. I would also like to thank them for including another important priority in the budget, and that priority is Ontario's environment. For example, this budget allocates more than \$200 million over the next three years to fund climate change initiatives. This announcement is very important to me, as I have introduced a private member's bill to create an annual Climate Change Awareness Day. This day would help encourage Ontarians to take their own climate change initiatives to complement the work of our government.

There are many other environmental initiatives addressed in the budget as well, including \$125 million for immediate initiatives to establish a greener economy. That includes a \$150 rebate for homeowners who get the home energy audits, replacing a federal program that was cut but much needed; \$2 million to fund tree planting to remove carbon dioxide from the air; and \$1.5 million to distribute \$500,000 energy-efficient light bulbs to Ontario homes this year. These light bulbs will save enough energy to power 5,200 homes a year. We're also setting targets to double the installed capacity of renewable energy generation by 2025. We are supporting the production of ethanol fuel in Ontario through the \$520-million Ontario ethanol growth fund.

Our government also remains committed to phasing out the use of coal-fired electricity plants, which will reduce greenhouse emissions by 30 million tonnes. We are taking action to reduce gridlock and greenhouse gas

emissions by providing alternatives to driving, with a \$352 million investment in the Move Ontario program—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. The member for Huron–Bruce.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron–Bruce): More good news for the riding of Huron–Bruce: I rise today to speak about an exciting announcement from the recently tabled 2007 budget and the great things that it will do for the riding of Huron–Bruce.

The 2007 budget was very good news to the riding. I want to share the great news with the members, especially across the way: the announcement of \$600 million to construct a 500-kilovolt line from Bruce to Milton on a widened existing transmission corridor.

This new transmission agreement, which was chosen by the Ontario Power Authority as their preferred route for Ontario's newest clean energy corridor, will facilitate the transmission of clean energy from the Bruce Power site and the many wind energy sites in the Huron–Bruce area. By moving forward with this project, which will handle approximately 3,000 megawatts of new energy, this government is taking a major step in addressing the orange zone constraints that have been affecting renewable standard offer contract projects in the area. This new line will be completed by 2011.

This announcement from the budget once again solidifies the fact that the McGuinty government is working for the people of Ontario and that this government is fully committed to supporting clean, renewable energy and a clean baseload power—

The Speaker: Thank you. The member for Perth–Middlesex.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): I rise in the House today to speak about how this government's recent budget will take the better path and improve the economy and, in turn, expand opportunity for all Ontarians.

First of all, we balanced the budget and, if we do not require the reserve next year, we are on track for five consecutive balanced budgets. After inheriting a \$5.5-billion deficit from the previous Conservative government, we've restored investors' faith in a fiscally responsible Ontario and are now ushering in a new era of balanced budgets.

Our Liberal budget will cut high business education tax rates, benefiting over 500,000 businesses. The experts agree: Len Crispino, president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, raved about our budget, saying, "The reduction in the BET rates ... will lead to increased productivity, job creation and output. Over 300 communities across this province will benefit from reduced industrial and commercial tax rates totalling \$540 million."

Incredibly, the Conservatives say they'll vote against this. The Leader of the Opposition says our budget is simply more Liberal spending. Yes, we are spending, but on programs that matter to Ontarians, and we're doing it in a fiscally responsible manner, unlike the Tories, who cut spending on important programs and still managed to add \$48 billion to the debt. We already know that John

Tory wants to take \$2.6 billion out of the health care system while cutting taxes and increasing spending. This is the kind of back-of-an-envelope policy-making that created the \$5.5-billion deficit that we inherited and that destroyed public services. We intend to take the better path.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I ask for unanimous consent to put forth a motion without notice regarding the membership of certain committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the following change, effective immediately, be made to the membership of the following committee: On the standing committee on public accounts, Mr. Lalonde replaces Mr. Arthurs.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? Carried.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CHILD POVERTY

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): It gives me great pleasure to speak about the Ontario child benefit, which Finance Minister Greg Sorbara unveiled last Thursday. We know the future depends on the type of start that we give our children in life. The \$2.1-billion Ontario child benefit is a historic investment that will help to give our vulnerable children the opportunity they deserve. It's at the heart of our government's 2007 budget because our government believes that Ontario's future depends on giving our children the best possible start in life.

Unfortunately, many children come from families who are struggling to make ends meet. If only they had some of the opportunities that so many of us have been fortunate to have been afforded, they could move beyond the poverty they struggle against. Our society pays a heavy price when our children grow up in poverty. That heavy price is the cost of failed opportunities, lost hopes and forgotten dreams.

Let me share with you a sampling of statements on poverty from grade 4 and 5 children in North Bay, taken from excerpts from *Our Neighbours' Voices: Will We Listen?*

"Poverty is being afraid to tell your mom you need new gym shoes."

"Poverty is feeling ashamed when my dad can't get a job."

"Poverty is not getting a hot dog on hot dog day."

"Poverty is pretending that you forgot your lunch."

"Poverty is hiding your feet so the teacher won't get cross when you don't have boots."

"Poverty is not buying books at the book fair."

"Poverty is not getting to go on school trips."

"Poverty is being teased for the way you are dressed."

What is perhaps even more discouraging is to hear from members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, who say, "Poverty in my classroom is students who have no hope for the future because the future costs money."

An Ontario where children and youth have no hope for the future is not the kind of Ontario that our government wishes for its children and youth. Our government has been tackling the issue of poverty from many angles, and we are determined to do more. That is why we are championing strong, progressive initiatives that will make a difference in the lives of 1.3 million Ontario children in 600,000 lower-income families.

The Ontario child benefit is about opportunity. It is about making that opportunity available to everyone. Our government has taken a giant leap forward to expand opportunities for all Ontario's children and families so no one is left behind because of a lack of opportunity.

We cannot separate social and economic priorities if we want to have an inclusive society. So we went one step further than just simply ending the clawback of the national child benefit supplement. We are providing assistance to every lower-income family in Ontario. The Ontario child benefit is about increasing opportunity to help people get out of poverty and get on with building a better future for their children.

The Ontario child benefit is also about giving parents the opportunity to move off social assistance without worrying about losing support for their children. It is about enabling families to make real choices for the betterment of their children and, more importantly, to see the realization of the hopes and dreams they have for their children.

The Ontario child benefit will fundamentally change how our children receive the benefits they need, benefits that our government believes children deserve.

Most income support is provided through social assistance, and that excludes the majority of low-income working families. The Ontario child benefit provides help to all children in lower income families. In the first five years, these families will receive an additional \$2.1 billion. Ontario children and their families will be better off.

The experts agree that our government has made the right investment for the right reasons. Gail Nyberg, executive director of the Daily Bread Food Bank, says, "It's been a long time since poverty reduction measures were at the forefront of a provincial budget in Ontario. We congratulate the government for having the courage to take on this significant issue, and we expect to see a

reduction in food bank use in the coming years as a result.... The Ontario child benefit will reduce barriers faced by families with children who are trying to leave welfare for work."

Finally, an editorial from the *Globe and Mail* last Friday said the McGuinty government has "devised an Ontario child benefit that, when fully implemented in ... 2011, would be on the cutting edge of 21st-century social policy reform."

Our budget clearly demonstrates that Ontario is well-positioned to take on the challenges of the 21st century. But in order to ensure our province's prosperity, we will need every person in Ontario to achieve his or her individual potential. The Ontario child benefit will help to make this a reality. Helping children in lower income families to succeed is the right thing to do, and it is the smart thing to do for our society—a society that enables all children a real chance at success in life.

I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in supporting the Ontario child benefit. We owe it to the 1.3 million children of Ontario who will benefit; we owe it to the 600,000 families who will benefit. This is an investment in our children, an investment in Ontario families and an investment in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod (Nepean—Carleton): I'm pleased to respond, on behalf of John Tory and the Progressive-Conservative caucus, to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. At first blush, this child benefit program is very supportable. The problem with it is that the child benefit program was not designed with children's poverty in mind; it was designed with votes in mind. The cynicism is that sometime this summer, right before Ontario families go to the polls, they will be receiving \$250 per child as a cheque under this new Ontario child benefit law.

Interjections.

Ms. MacLeod: They can applaud all they like, but as my leader John Tory said yesterday in this Legislature, "It's interesting to me that when it moves the government, as a result of the electoral timetable, to have a down payment available of this child benefit on July 1, undoubtedly with some flowing letter from the minister or the Premier taking personal credit for this use of the taxpayers' dollars."

Sadly, Dalton McGuinty has had four years to provide some much-needed help to Ontario's children, but he has refused. Only now at the 11th hour, after three and a half years of dithering and delaying, has Dalton McGuinty decided to get serious about child poverty, and he is only doing so because it is an election year.

As Randall Denley, an Ottawa Citizen columnist, pointed out this past week, "A new program to help families on welfare and the working poor is the centrepiece of the budget. It's the kind of thing that will be applauded by the NDP voters the Liberals are trolling for, but the government can't even afford a modest new monthly payment this fiscal year, settling for a \$250 handout in July instead. The real cost of this \$2.1-billion

program is only \$190 million this fiscal year. By moving the big increases out several years," he says, "the government gets maximum political torque for minimum dollar spending. The poor get a pittance."

Randall Denley adds that the poor will only get their full payment by 2011.

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So here we are today, celebrating a vote-buying down payment, when it will take another four to five years before Ontario's most vulnerable families will even derive any benefit from the plan. They need this help today.

As Lorrie Goldstein, a Sun chain columnist says of this cynical program, "Worse, McGuinty's budget attempts to guilt-trip middle-class Ontarians into silence. How? By earmarking billions of their tax dollars to be paid out, eventually, to poor families and children now living on welfare, through his so-called Ontario child benefit."

Laughter.

Ms. MacLeod: I hear the ministers laughing, so guess what? Just for them, I'm going to throw in a little bit of rabble.ca, because of course they're thinking that we're a little too right-leaning over here. Michelle Langlois writes:

"People on social assistance will continue to have the federal benefit clawed back from their welfare cheques. The new provincial benefit will not be clawed back...."

"Seems like a pretty clear and easy-to-understand policy, right?"

"Then why is the McGuinty government trying to confuse people by claiming that the new Ontario child benefit will 'effectively end the current clawback of up to \$122 per child per month from the national child benefit supplement' according to ... the Toronto Star on Friday?"

"The answer is simple. The Liberal government promised during the 2003 election campaign to end the child tax benefit clawback from the families who need it most desperately: social assistance recipients. As with many of their ... promises, they did not follow through." Their words—rabble's words—not mine.

The word "poverty" never, ever appeared in any other McGuinty budget until last week. So I have to ask: Why the focus now? Why not the full benefit now? Why implement a half-baked scheme right before a provincial election?

This plan will not address the real needs of families in poverty. As always, the McGuinty Liberals will fall far short of offering real results. To take a phrase from the minister, "Poverty is not being addressed today."

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member for Simcoe North and the Minister of Health, you can have this conversation outside much more productively.

The member for Hamilton East.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have to start by saying how ironic I found it that the amount a low-income family is going to receive under the Ontario child benefit is less than the amount the finance minister

spent on his new shoes for budget day. Sales tax included, the finance minister's new shoes, size 7 Ecco lace-ups, cost \$256.50, more than the \$250 Ontario families are going to receive over one year. That is a reflection of the seriousness that this government doesn't have in terms of ending child poverty in this province. In fact, I've actually taken the opportunity to rename this budget myself. I consider it the McGuinty government's "inaction plan to deal with child poverty."

Was the purpose of the minister's new shoes to throw the boots at hard-working families in Ontario? It certainly seems that way, because that's what the McGuinty Liberals are doing by continuing to claw back the national child benefit supplement. And, yes, they are continuing to claw back the national child benefit supplement here in Ontario.

Dalton McGuinty first promised to end the clawback in the 2003 election. Now he says that he needs to get elected again to get that done. Ontario's most hard-pressed families have had to wait five more years before seeing an end to the clawback. Premier Dalton McGuinty promised to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement, and he still has not kept that promise. In fact, he expects people to believe that eventually, if they give him another chance, he might actually get it done in another five years. I don't know. I don't think the people of Ontario are prepared to fall for that once again.

Do you know what? They're not not ending the clawback for lack of impetus to get that done. In fact, New Democrats have asked them to do that many, many times in this House. We've been demanding over and over again—177 times on 52 separate occasions did we try to convince the government that the right thing to do was just to fulfill their very own promise to end the national child benefit clawback, and they still refused to do it. Finally, when the McGuinty government does act, it's a program of half measures that shows they are completely out of touch with the poverty that has rocked communities across this province, including my own city of Hamilton. The Ontario child benefit amounts to about \$190 million this year, which is less—less—than the cost of actually ending the clawback, at about \$220 million. They're not ending the clawback today, not this year, not next year, not the year after that. They're phasing in their child benefit over five years, a long, long time in the life of a child.

Dalton McGuinty promised to end it, saying, "The clawback is wrong and we will end it." But instead, now he's pushed the end of the clawback of the federal benefit back yet another five years. Families can't afford to wait that long, Mr. Finance Minister, Madam Minister, Mr. Premier. They cannot wait that long. Another five years is simply unacceptable.

I know that the families in Hamilton can't wait, and that's why Hamilton council took the opportunity not too long ago to try to end the clawback on their own with their very own very tight municipal budget. We know what that budget looks like; at least, anybody from Hamilton should know what that budget looks like. But

they tried to do the right thing—not like you. They tried to do the right thing and take your responsibility because they see the pain and the suffering that occurs in neighbourhood after neighbourhood in the city of Hamilton.

And the minister can talk a nice talk, she can say how much she feels their pain, but I can tell you, they don't think that you feel their pain, because they don't see any results in this budget that are going to end that pain. That's the bottom line.

Children who were born when McGuinty promised to end the clawback will be eight years old when their families finally see the value of the national child benefit returned to them. Those who were 10 are going to miss out altogether because they're going to be too old to even receive it. Meanwhile, children living in poverty are still waiting for action on other Dalton McGuinty promises, and I'm going to take an opportunity to list some of those as well.

ODSP and OW rates are barely keeping pace with inflation, and people living on them are still worse off in real terms than they were under the Mike Harris government. Dalton McGuinty promised to invest \$300 million in new provincial child care money, but instead he's pocketed over \$140 million of federal money that was supposed to be spent on child care. Child care is another key example of the McGuinty Liberals' complete falling down on their promises to kids. A government that claims to want to help today's working families should be investing in a comprehensive, made-in-Ontario program of affordable, accessible not-for-profit child care. Just yesterday Dr. Fraser Mustard, the leading authority on children's early learning and care, said the McGuinty government's Best Start program of child care is a disaster. The budget delivers very, very little in terms of child care, and the budget delivers very, very little in terms of child poverty, and this government should be ashamed, not proud.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, responsible for the lottery corporation. Yesterday, during a press conference, the minister claimed that he was not made aware of potential game-fixing rip-offs running rampant through the lottery corporation until 10 days before the CBC aired its program called Luck of the Draw. Does this McGuinty minister stand by that statement made yesterday?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I had an opportunity to see the Ombudsman's report and respond to it. I did comment yesterday that the transcript of the CBC program was shared with me approximately

10 days or two weeks prior to its airing and that's when I first became aware of these matters. I would also want the House to know that as soon as that did happen, we ordered a third-party investigation, as was raised in this House, KPMG.

Of course, we had an independent officer of this Legislature investigate, and that was the Ombudsman's report. I had the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. fully co-operate with that investigation. The Ombudsman conducted his review, the concerns were raised, and yesterday he issued his report. Yesterday he made some additional allegations in his comments. I have instructed that all of the material that was reviewed by the Ombudsman be forwarded to the Ontario Provincial Police for their review, and they will determine what the next appropriate steps are.

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Mr. Tory: The first we've heard of this qualification of now the transcript of the television program being brought to your attention is this very minute in the House, and of course the only reason half the stuff happened in the fall of 2006 was because of the television program and because it was brought to your attention.

But the fact of the matter is that in the Globe and Mail this morning, we read of an e-mail that was sent to two senior officials in your ministry and to Mr. Wilson Lee, who was at the time your communications director, now your chief of staff. That was on April 11, 2006. This e-mail talked about exactly what the CBC was already beginning in April to investigate and asked for the advice of your staff on what should be done relative to that investigation. So why would you say that you knew nothing about this until October 2006, when in fact senior members of your staff were engaged in e-mail correspondence with the lottery corporation about this very same subject, the subject matter of the TV program, in April? Why do you say it was October, when your office knew in April? Do you expect us to believe your staff didn't brief you on it?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The member is incorrect in the information that he is providing. What happened in April was, as the standard protocol set up by both previous governments, that an FOI request was made. It was simply a heads-up to our office that it had been made, and the advice to Ontario Lottery and Gaming was that they comply with the statutory requirements, that all ministries and agencies are to forward the information as requested under freedom of information. That information is to be used by the parties who request it in whatever way they wish.

Of course, what subsequently ensued was that the Fifth Estate did in fact interview staff at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. That transcript was shared with me about two weeks prior to the program airing.

Mr. Tory: You are trying to have us believe, then, that this really was just treated by your staff and by you—because you implied that they had in fact told you

it was a routine request for freedom of information. When the subject matter of that is about members of the public who are buying tickets from the lottery corporation being ripped off, you just treated this as another routine, run-of-the-mill freedom of information request? The very fact that you would expect any of us to believe that your senior advisers would not tell you in detail and you wouldn't ask any questions about an e-mail that concerned money being stolen from innocent Ontarians, or allegations in that regard, calls into question your fitness for office.

Come clean. Admit now that in April you knew that the CBC was investigating allegations of money being stolen from innocent Ontarians, people who bought their tickets in good faith. Come clean and tell us at least that you knew that in April. Come on, now.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I'm happy to correct the member in the comments that he makes. He's got it completely wrong.

As the standard protocol set up by previous governments, when an FOI is made, there is an alert, and that is it. In fact, the protocol states that we are not supposed to know who has made the request; you know the nature of the request and what members are going to do with it. I know that the member and members of the other party know full well, having served in government during their time, that this is a standard protocol to provide information, whether it's to opposition parties, to the media or to any member of the general public who requests it. That is in fact the transparency that I and this government adhere to.

I would indicate to the member opposite that we've had an independent officer of this Legislature, whose investigation we welcomed. We brought in KPMG. We've had a standing committee of this Legislature go over and look at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. That is in stark contrast to the record of this member and his government when they were in office, who prevented the standing committee on government agencies from reviewing—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. New question.

Mr. Tory: My question again is to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal and responsible for the lottery corporation. I don't know what turnip truck you think people in this Legislature or in the public fell off of that you would think they would believe that you would receive an alert about freedom of information about people in this province being ripped off of their money by the lottery corporation and that you wouldn't ask any questions. That's an indictment of you in and of itself, that you wouldn't ask any questions about that.

This McGuinty minister is trying to keep up the fiction in this House that he was somehow kept in the dark. You should drop the joke that you were kept in the dark and take some responsibility for the six-month period that passed during which time there was a \$100-million scandal involving the theft of money from innocent people across the province.

Either you knew and you were wilfully negligent in not acting on it, or you didn't even bother to ask when someone came in and said there were inquiries being made by the CBC. Either way, you are part of the problem. Either way, you should resign so people can be reassured that this place is actually operating with any sense of integrity at all.

Interjection: What did Hudak know?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: My colleague says, "What did Hudak know?" Mr. Hudak in fact was the minister responsible at the time of the Edmonds case, which was the subject of the FOI request, and I think that's a reasonable question. Why does Mr. Tory prevent Mr. Hudak and Mr. Sterling, two ministers under a previous government responsible for this corporation, from coming forward and sharing what they knew, what they did, what actions they took?

Unfortunately, it speaks volumes that this government has taken great pains to provide transparency and clarity and co-operation with legislative officers, legislative committees, with outside parties like KPMG, in contrast to the previous government, which obstructed, allegedly, legislative officers, which never allowed standing committees on government agencies to meet, which unfortunately presided over these cases and stood by and did nothing—

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Tory: Only this McGuinty minister would try to blame anybody else he possibly can for the fact that he sat on his derrière for six months while people in this province were ripped off. He knew it was going on, he knew people were asking, and he did absolutely nothing. The ticket-buyers have been ripped off, they have lost confidence in the lottery corporation, and this minister, this McGuinty minister, is part of the problem. We now know he stood by while these lottery games were fixed.

You are also responsible for the LCBO, for billions of dollars' worth of other projects. When someone is under a cloud like this, they can't continue in this job. Why don't you do the honourable thing and step aside pending a full and complete investigation of this matter?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.
Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I know that all members understand the partisan nature of this. That's why I place my faith and trust in an independent, unbiased, non-partisan observer—the independent officer of the Legislature, the Ombudsman. He says, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

Taking responsibility means rolling up your sleeves and fixing the problem that we, unfortunately, inherited from previous governments, and that's what I and this government are doing. This government is implementing all of the Ombudsman's recommendations. I've directed the OLG to implement all of the Ombudsman's recommendations and all of the KPMG recommendations.

I am pleased to report to this House that 17 of the 60 recommendations have already been put in place, 25 more will be in place by the end of June, and the other 18 are on track to get implemented. I have also directed that all files be made available to the—

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: The one question the Ombudsman was not asked to opine on is what he would have thought of the fact that you, for six months, sat on your can when you knew this rip-off was going on and did absolutely nothing about it, absolutely nothing. I can guarantee that had the Ombudsman been asked to comment on that, he would have said it was a disgraceful abdication of responsibility for you to know about this and do nothing until you were caught. You did nothing until you were caught.

You can't possibly believe yourself that you did everything you could when you knew about this in April. You can't possibly believe it. Millions of dollars potentially being stolen from innocent people, and you did absolutely nothing from April until October, when you were exposed and you had to act, and now you're standing taking credit for it. You knew or you ought to have known, and in either case you should resign because you have demonstrated yourself unfit to hold this office and to have these responsibilities. Will you do the right thing and resign?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I have had communication from the Ombudsman, and he says in a letter to me, "I am satisfied with the positive commitment made by the corporation and by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal to implement my recommendations."

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The Ombudsman has confidence in the work that this government and I as minister have undertaken. That's the kind of leadership we have. Unfortunately, in the past, we've covered these matters up; we've looked the other way. The problem was born in a previous government and nurtured by yours. Unfortunately, members opposite did not take this seriously, but I and this government take this responsibility, this allegation and the recommendations extremely seriously.

We will implement them all. We will make sure that public trust and confidence are upheld and restored. I welcome the OPP and all the work they are going to do to get to the bottom of the matters that were raised by the Ombudsman.

The Speaker: New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): A question to the minister responsible for lotteries about Dalton McGuinty's \$100-million insider lottery scandal, about innocent people being cheated out of millions of dollars, about a Premier who has gone AWOL and about a cabinet minister who needs to be straight with the people of Ontario.

Minister, yesterday you claimed that you were completely in the dark. You heard nothing, you saw nothing and you knew nothing until October 2006, when the CBC

got ready to play their show. Do you stand by your tale today, or are you ready to correct your own record?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: As I had a chance to review the chronology earlier with the Leader of the Opposition, those are the facts that I have laid out publicly; that is the truth. I have taken very directed action. In fact, the Ombudsman has commented on what I as minister have done and what this government has done. The Ombudsman says in his report—and I know the member has a copy—"I am happy to see that both the government and OLG appear to be headed in the right direction." He goes further: "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring" the changes.

I will not shirk my responsibility, which is to instill the public's trust and confidence in the public's corporation. That is a responsibility that I take extremely seriously, and I will continue to do that. I certainly welcome the questions from the member opposite. He would be well advised to know that the Ontario Provincial Police have directed toward them—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: After the Ombudsman hits you over the head with the evidence and wakes you up, you suddenly want to say, "Oh, I'm the hero around here." But it's very clear on the record that six months before, three officials in your office in the ministry were informed by the lottery corporation. They weren't informed about any run-of-the-mill details; they were informed about an 82-year-old man being ripped off—cheated—of \$250,000 that he had won.

Are you trying to tell the innocent people of Ontario that your staff wouldn't tell you that this was about an innocent man who was cheated out of \$250,000, that they wouldn't share those details with you and that, those details being shared with you, you wouldn't ask, "What's going on here?"

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The facts of the matter are, as I've stated here in this House, I have had occasion to be asked about the case of Mr. Edmonds by both the opposition parties. I have apologized to him—that is recorded in Hansard—as have the president and CEO, formerly, of Ontario Lottery and Gaming.

I believe that Mr. Edmonds was treated disrespectfully, improperly, especially from a corporation where I would expect much better to be done. Of course, the gentleman seated two seats to your right was the minister responsible at the time when Mr. Edmonds's case arose in 2001. I would hope that all members, honourable as they are, would come forward with any information they have—what they knew, when they knew it and what they did at that time. I certainly can't answer on behalf of other members, but perhaps the member from Erie–Lincoln could provide some insight into what was done in the case of Bob Edmonds: What was ordered, what was not, what role he or others played in the treatment that Mr. Edmonds ultimately—

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, before this is done, we may get to other people, but you see, you were the minister in charge. You were the minister who was supposed to be protecting the innocent people in Ontario when the story of rip-offs unfolded. You were the minister who was happy to sit in your chair like a bump on a log and pretend that you saw nothing, heard nothing and knew nothing while all around you your own staff knew what was going on. For example, Mike McRae, a senior policy advisor in your ministry, corresponded with the OLG by e-mail about reporters' questions and about the case of Bob Edmonds, the 82-year-old man who was ripped off to the tune of \$250,000. This is what they said. On May 11, 2006, McRae wrote that he had no issues with the lottery and gaming corporation's communication plan but he asked, "Do you have a status update on these that I can provide to those interested?"

Minister, you're the one in charge. Are you trying to tell us that you wouldn't be interested?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: Of course the advice that I would expect to be provided to Ontario Lottery and Gaming is to comply with freedom of information, a statute of long standing and a protocol which has been in place in this province through governments of all stripes. I certainly believe that the public interest is paramount and that we need transparency and access to this kind of information, whether it's opposition members, the media or the public in general. That's why I have taken the steps that I have to ensure that this matter comes to light.

Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. The folks in previous governments locked doors or made sure that information was not provided to have these things come out, but that's not the approach that I and this government take. We want to reveal what the problems are and we also want to make sure that the problems are fixed, that Ontarians are not treated in this manner again and that the public corporations are in fact upholding—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question, leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: To the minister responsible for lotteries: Minister, here's what is unbelievably incomprehensible on your part. You see, these weren't e-mails out of the blue. These weren't e-mails that were totally disconnected. You had the court case, where Mr. Edmonds took the lottery corporation to court and said that they had defrauded him. He won the court case. That received media attention. The OLG was forced to pay him \$200,000; that received some attention. These are things that any minister with any reasonable intelligence should have known about.

Then there was the police investigation—a criminal investigation. Then your staff get e-mails from staff at the lottery corporation telling you that there is reporters' interest in this. Now, any reasonable cabinet minister with even a margin of intelligence would have thought, "Gee, maybe I'd better ask some questions here." Didn't you think at any time when all of this was unfolding that maybe you should ask some questions and find out what's going on?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I understand, all members in this House understand, the partisan nature of the different sides of the House. That's why I have considerable faith in the Ombudsman, an unbiased, non-partisan legislative officer. When he writes to me and says, "I am satisfied with the positive commitments made by the corporation and by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal to implement my recommendations," I take that to heart and I take that seriously. But the Ombudsman goes further and says, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

The Ombudsman understands that this government takes a back seat to no one when it comes to revealing what the problems are and then fixing a mess that is inherited from others. The Ombudsman has confidence in me and the Ombudsman has confidence in this government. The Ombudsman has provided us with an appropriate roadmap in an unbiased and non-partisan way and we understand the—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

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Mr. Hampton: Minister, Wilson Lee was your communications director, your personal communications director. He wasn't ministry staff. He was your political staff. He was also informed that the CBC was interested in this story about the 82-year-old man who had been cheated out of \$250,000. You must know Wilson Lee. He is now your chief of staff. He is your right-hand person. Are you telling us that Wilson Lee didn't tell you that the CBC was doing research about this 82-year-old man who had been cheated out of \$250,000 in the lottery scandal, that he didn't tell you about that six months before you say you knew?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I know that the member for Kenora—Rainy River, a former member of the executive council, is quite familiar with the protocols under freedom of information. He knows quite well that a heads-up is given, but no details are provided, and that it would not be the usual course of business to pursue that and inquire with that further.

He also knows in the case of Bob Edmonds the actions that I have taken as minister and the apology that I have given. He also knows that the member for Erie—Lincoln was the minister at the time when Mr. Edmonds had his unfortunate run-in with Ontario Lottery and Gaming. I cannot answer for what happened in 2001 and 2002, and subsequently, I cannot provide any insight to this House for what actions were taken or not taken, what conversations were had or not had, who made the decision to drag Bob Edmonds through court and to treat him so disrespectfully. I cannot provide those kinds of answers. I hope that members of this Legislative Assembly, honourable all, will step forward with any information that they have. The police are now reviewing the matters that the Ombudsman has—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: This is about the events that transpired, after you became minister, in the spring of 2005. This is about the Ontario lottery corporation spending \$200,000 to silence Mr. Edmonds, after you became minister. This is about all of that chain of events. Surely Mr. Lee would have said to you, "Minister, here's the chain of events. This is what this is about." In fact, let me put it to you in another way. If Mr. Lee, as your communications director, didn't tell you about the repercussions, about the fact that this man had been cheated out of \$250,000, that it was possible that other people were also being cheated out of money—if Mr. Lee didn't tell you that, wouldn't you say Mr. Lee should resign for being complicit in a cover-up of corruption?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It's very interesting to hear the member opposite. The Ontario Provincial Police will soon be in receipt of all of the files that the Ombudsman reviewed. They'll soon be in receipt of all of the information in order to make a determination and review what has happened and what the next appropriate step should be.

The Ombudsman in fact has rendered an opinion about the seriousness and the level of commitment of this government and of myself as minister. I will read for the member again the Ombudsman's comments in this regard, where he says on page 68 of his report, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment in ensuring change."

Unfortunately, past governments have chosen to look the other way. Unfortunately, they nurtured this culture, this OLG environment that the Ombudsman talks about that needs to be changed. That is not good enough for this government and for me as minister. I am committed to making and ensuring that the changes are made so that the public interest will be protected. That is my responsibility. That is my job. And that is my commitment to this House, that that work will be done.

The Speaker: New Question. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: A question for the minister in charge of the lottery corporation: The fact is that you keep telling the House and the people of Ontario over and over again how the Ombudsman makes these comments about you. He is not commenting at all on the period of time before you got caught. He's not commenting on anything you did before you got caught. You only did anything after you got caught. He specifically is not commenting, and you know it, on the period between April and October when you stood by and saw millions of dollars stolen from people on your watch.

Let's be clear as to exactly what you're saying. Aside from the FOI alert—and you're implying that it was like a sentence that somebody read to you in a note, or just told you that there was an FOI request—you are telling this House and the people of Ontario that there was no discussion at all with anyone as to any money being ripped off from anybody and no discussion at all with

your staff or anybody else, no discussion at all about any allegations concerning lottery money being stolen. If that's so, if you expect us to believe that, why didn't you ask some questions about it? Why didn't you say, "Well, gee, I don't know what the FOI request is about, but is there something going on at the lottery corporation"? Did you feel no responsibility at all to the people whose money was being stolen?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The Ombudsman comments about a very long period of time of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., going back a long way and up to the present day. So I don't think the member really is very accurate in his comments portraying the Ombudsman's report.

I would also say that the Ombudsman and KPMG have identified some 60 recommendations for implementation: 17 have already been implemented, another 25 will be implemented by the end of June, and the other 18 are a work in progress and have begun. That is why the Ombudsman has in fact said that he commends me as minister and commends this government for taking the necessary and decisive action in order to instill public trust and confidence in their corporation.

Even beyond that, the Ombudsman has made some very serious allegations, and that is why I have directed that the files be forwarded to the Ontario Provincial Police. I understand the leader of the official opposition does not believe that the police should be reviewing the matter. I can't for the life of me understand why, but I think, given the nature of the allegations—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tory: Just like every answer he's given, he just stands there and makes up these answers. He stands there and makes up things I say, but unfortunately, he makes up everything else in his answers too.

Now, you can carry on with this non-answering and weaving and dodging all you want, but I just want to make sure that this is perfectly clear on the record in this House, speaking to the Legislature and the people of Ontario. You are telling us that you had no briefings, no discussions with your staff, no discussions with Mr. Brown, no discussions with anybody else from the lottery corporation, and no discussions with anybody else from the board ever before October 2006 on this matter. That is what you are telling us; that is what you just said. That is what you've repeated over and over again today. You've been dodging and weaving. Get up and confirm once and for all that there were no discussions with any of those people any time—you never asked a question and you never got an answer because you didn't care about people's money being ripped off by these people on your watch. Get up and confirm: no discussions, no briefing with anybody from April to October or any time before October.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I think it's disappointing that the member opposite, a member of a party that swept these matters under the rug and that nurtured this kind of environment, now doesn't feel that quick and decisive action to deal with problems that he and his government

unfortunately left and ignored for many, many years—that he has some difficulty with that. I don't understand why the member opposite would not have the confidence in the Ontario Provincial Police to get to the bottom of the very significant matter that the Ombudsman has raised.

I have stated, now in the eighth reply to questions in this House, that I'm happy to answer all day to the very best of my ability. I can tell you that I believe leadership means rolling up your sleeves and fixing problems that have been left and that others, unfortunately, have swept aside, have ignored and have not had the gumption to deal with.

I want this member, all members of this Legislature and all the people of Ontario to know that these are serious matters, and I will not rest until public trust and confidence is restored in the corporation. That's my undertaking.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question.

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Mr. Hampton: Again to the minister responsible for lotteries: Minister, you keep trying to insist that you were kept in the dark in April 2006. You see, the e-mail that came from the lotteries corporation to Wilson Lee, your director of communications, asked for his input on what information should be released to the CBC. Are you trying to tell these innocent people across Ontario who have been ripped off millions of dollars that a communication would come from the lottery corporation to your director of communications, now your chief of staff, now your right-hand person, asking for input on what information should be released, and your director of communications wouldn't say to you, "This is what it's about, Minister"? Do you honestly expect the innocent people across Ontario who have been cheated out of millions of dollars to believe that kind of story?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I expect the people of Ontario to believe the Ombudsman. I expect them to believe the Ontario Provincial Police. I expect them to believe the truth, that the freedom-of-information protocol, which all governments of all stripes have adhered to, was strictly adhered to here, and any advice to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. would be to comply with the freedom-of-information statute as passed by this Legislature to ensure that—be it a media source, be it an opposition party or any member of the public—they had full access to the information that they had requested. That was the case under the New Democrats, it was the case under the Conservatives and it is the case under this government as well. Those are the facts of the matter. The facts of the matter are also that this government and myself as minister have taken decisive action to restore the public trust and confidence as outlined by the Ombudsman.

I would highlight the accomplishments. To date, 17 recommendations have already been implemented, 25 more by the end of June, and the remaining 18 recommendations as contained in the two reports have begun and will be—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: Minister, after hundreds, if not thousands, of innocent Ontarians have been ripped off under your watch, after the Ombudsman hits you on the side of the head with a report that talks about a culture of corruption in the lotteries corporation on your watch—but those aren't the questions here. The question is this. Your staff would have at least given you an elementary briefing on this so that you wouldn't be making decisions completely in the dark. They would have at least said, "Bob Edmonds is an 82-year-old man. He's been cheated out of \$250,000." My question is, when you got that kind of elementary briefing, didn't you at some point think to start asking questions about what is going on in the lotteries corporation such that an 82-year-old man can be cheated out of \$250,000?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It's unfortunate that I have to correct the member on the factual comments. Mr. Edmonds's case began in the year 2001. That is a matter of public record. Mr. Edmonds can tell you that himself. The minister at the time was a member from Erie-Lincoln, Mr. Hudak. I would encourage Mr. Hudak to provide answers to the leader of the third party's questions. In fact, I saw earlier that he was conferring with the leader of the official opposition. Perhaps Mr. Tory would be good enough to have Mr. Hudak or—I see Mr. Sterling, who was also the minister responsible between 2002 and 2003, and I would ask that they please cooperate with the Ontario Provincial Police. I don't know whether they did or did not confer with the Ombudsman.

I can tell you that the commitment to transparency and accountability of this minister and of this government are noted by the Ombudsman, where he provides his commendation for the minister and for the government for its openness and responsiveness.

CHILD POVERTY

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Earlier today in your statement, you quoted from a study prepared in my riding about grade 4 students as they talked about how it felt to live in poverty. In our 2007 budget, we are making a historic investment to assist children living in lower-income families. The introduction of an Ontario child benefit will give lower-income families across Ontario greater opportunities to help their children reach their full potential. Lana Mitchell, an amazing social advocate in my riding and the executive director of Low Income People Involvement, or LIPI, stated that she was pleased to see the introduction of an Ontario child benefit. Minister, could you please share with us when these families will receive the benefit?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'd like to thank the member from Nipissing for her question and for her advocacy on behalf of her constituents.

The Ontario child benefit will, in fact, start to make a difference in the lives of kids this year. By the end July 2007, the first payment of up to \$250 per child will be

received. Each year, the payments will increase, and at full maturity of this initiative in 2011, children can expect to receive up to \$1,100 of the Ontario child benefit. Families with a net family income of up to \$20,000 per year will be eligible for the full benefit. I should also mention that approximately 95% of families who will receive the Ontario child benefit will be families with net incomes of up to \$45,000 per year.

Ms. Smith: This is tremendous support for families in my community and for families across Ontario, who are doing their very best to provide their children with every opportunity possible.

I know that in addition to this financial support, lower-income families in my community also need services for their children, and along with Lana Mitchell, we have some amazing service providers in my riding. Minister, can you share with us the types of other supports that our government provides these families and how our most recent budget improves upon these?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Many lower-income families need child care. They say that they need child care, for example, to help them secure good jobs. I'm very pleased that last year, working in partnership with our municipalities, we were able to create almost 15,000 new child care spaces. And starting in January of this year, we have simplified the model used for determining eligibility for child care subsidies. So in fact, a family with net income of up to \$20,000 per year should be able to qualify for a full child care subsidy at an average cost of \$43 a day. That's a lot of support.

I'm also very pleased—you know, several people in my riding had talked to me about family literacy and parenting centres, which are particularly helpful, as it turns out, to lower-income families. In this budget, we have announced that we're not just going to secure and sustain those centres, we're also going to double the funding for such centres. There is a lot of good news in this budget for—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question? The Leader of the Opposition.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): A question for the minister responsible for lotteries: While the minister is having documentation sent over to the police, perhaps he could have them send over his emails back and forth between his office and the lottery corporation, and they can investigate the briefings that might have slipped the minister's mind.

He's very fond of quoting from the Ombudsman's report. Let me read him this quote from the Ombudsman's report: "I am not convinced, however, that the public can rely on the corporation alone to ensure that real reform takes place. The danger is too great that the OLG will continue to fall back into its old habits of coddling retailers and dismissing consumers' legitimate complaints."

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The fact that you would expect anyone here, or anywhere else for that matter, to believe that you had no briefings, no discussions, no meetings with anybody from the lottery corporation, from the board, with your staff, to do with this matter at all, including the Edmonds settlement, which I believe happened as well on your watch, means that you too are part of the problem, and you can't possibly stand here in this place and assure people that you are going to comfort them that more of their millions are not going to be stolen when you are there and you are still part of the problem, not the solution. Why don't you step aside so—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): The member opposite reads a passage from the Ombudsman's report, and that's precisely why the Minister of Government Services is engaged with me and, I can tell you, has met with the Ombudsman, in setting up the proper regulatory environment under the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

Would that, when we had set up lotteries and casinos and other gaming activities, we had had the proper oversight then as opposed to today—the culture of an organization, which the Ombudsman I think quite rightly points out, is a significant problem and does need to be addressed or rectified. Would that have happened, we may not have been in the situation where we are today. But given that that's how it was set up, it was nurtured under previous governments, and it takes this minister and this government with the wherewithal to clean up a mess which it has inherited.

Those are the facts of the matter. The Ombudsman has accepted and commended me and the government for the speed, for the responsiveness and for the commitment to acting to ensure that the public trust and confidence—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Tory: Minister, your credibility in this matter is very much in suspicion here. Your credibility is a big, big issue, and that goes to the very heart of whether or not you have the credibility in fact to oversee the various things that are going on with the Ombudsman, with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission and with all the others involved. And beyond that, it calls into question, frankly, your ability to carry on with the rest of your job. If there is a cloud of suspicion over you with respect to what you did not do between April and October, what you covered up, the fact that you turned your back on the fact and stood by while these games were being fixed and millions of dollars were being stolen from people, then it really calls into question your ability to be part of the solution and your ability to do the rest of your job, whether it's the LCBO or anything else.

Why don't you do the honourable thing and step down and convince the Premier that he should have an independent investigation of all of this, including your role

and what you didn't do, so that we can all be assured, most of all the ticket-buying public—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: We've had an all-party committee of this Legislature, chaired by a member of your own caucus. We've had a non-partisan, unbiased, independent officer of this Legislature, in the Ombudsman, do a sweeping and broad and excellent job in investigating this matter and coming up with solid recommendations, which are being implemented.

We've had one of Canada's leading audit forms, KPMG—I believe when the leader of the official opposition was in business, they were your auditors; I believe they are currently the auditors for the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario—also provide insight and be able to make recommendations how it can be improved.

I'm sure that after we've put the regulatory framework in place, Mr. Tory will be up on his feet commenting, complaining that it's just more red tape and more government waste, as he likes to do. I don't agree with that kind of settlement. I believe that this is important to ensure the public trust and the confidence that the public has—

The Speaker: New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is to the minister responsible for lotteries. Minister, yesterday you tried to make a big deal out of your words that the lottery corporation should turn over their records to the police. But, as the Ombudsman said in his report, there aren't many records, there's a dearth of records, and there's a reason for that. Scam artists and fraudsters don't usually leave records around.

But the question is this, Minister: When are you going to turn over your briefing notes, your records and your e-mails pertaining to the lottery rip-off so that people can see what you knew and why you didn't act?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The Ombudsman does comment and commends me as minister and the government for our openness, for our transparency. He does commend us for our responsiveness to the report and the recommendations, and he does acknowledge that we have an immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring the changes that are necessary, he says, in order to ensure the public trust and confidence.

I would encourage all members—the member from Erie–Lincoln, the member from Lanark–Carleton, the member from Kenora–Rainy River or anyone else—who might have information to share with the Ontario Provincial Police. I would hope that the member would co-operate. I know that I certainly have in the past and will in the future co-operate in any way that I can. I've instructed Ontario Lottery and Gaming to do the same. I believe it is important that Ontarians have an understanding that I will be relentless in making sure that public trust and confidence—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: You see, Minister, your words of yesterday were empty in another sense, because we know that the police, as part of a criminal investigation, could walk into the lottery corporation and get the records in their own right any time.

But the question is this, Minister: You were the minister in charge of a \$6.5-billion operation. We know from the media reports, from the court cases and from police investigations that people were being cheated. Your own staff knew that people were being cheated. The question that innocent people out there want to know is, where are your briefing notes? Where are your records? Where are your e-mails pertaining to what happened from the time you became minister in June 2005 up until the release of the Ombudsman's report? If the OLG should release their records, when is the McGuinty cabinet minister who was supposed to be protecting the public going to release—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I want this member to know that I will take all steps that are necessary, as I undertook to this House back in October of last year, to make sure that the public interest is protected, to make sure that we have transparency, openness and accountability at Ontario Lottery and Gaming in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. In fact, that is the commitment of a Premier who holds those values and ensures that we shine the light, whether it's through our independent officers like the Ombudsman or the Auditor General or whether it's through our police and proper legal authorities taking the appropriate actions to make sure the public trust and confidence is upheld.

The Ombudsman in fact has commented on the role that I have played and the government has played as far as what we've done. He says, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change." That's the Ombudsman—not a partisan member opposite but a non-partisan, unbiased, independent officer of this Legislature.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a question for the Minister of Finance today. As MPP for my community, I want to ensure that homeowners in Oakville will benefit from a property tax system that's fair, transparent and predictable. The previous government, and definitely the one before, introduced our current property tax system, and they simply failed to fix it.

Our government has made significant improvements to the system but, despite those improvements, I was still hearing from constituents that annual reassessments were causing sudden and very unpredictable changes, especially in areas like Oakville that have a strong real estate market.

In last week's budget, you proposed a new system that will strengthen the current property tax system in On-

tario. Can you please tell us more about that new system and what exactly it's going to mean to the constituents both of my riding and throughout Ontario?

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I want to say to my friend from Oakville and to all property owners in Ontario that what this new system will deliver is a more reliable, fairer and more predictable property tax assessment system.

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What we were trying to do when we cancelled assessments for 2007 and 2008 was give ourselves time to re-examine the system, and particularly to take the volatility out of the system. The four-year cycle will provide a much less volatile system, particularly for homeowners like those in Oakville, who might see increases in value. If those increases in value are identified, they will be smoothed in over the course of four years. The other thing to point out is it that if there is a decrease in value, the homeowner will be able to take advantage of that decrease right away.

It's going to be more predictable, less volatile, fairer and more transparent, and we're very proud of it.

Mr. Flynn: Previous attempts at that reform by previous governments were a complete disaster; certainly in Oakville they were. The people in Oakville and Ontario want a property tax system that's going to ensure predictability and stability for all homeowners and for the hard-working taxpayers of our communities.

Minister, I'd like to ask just how you came to the decision to go with this particular system. As you know, some groups and other political parties have called for a 5% cap on assessment increases. Could you please tell us why you chose the option you did, how other proposals, such as capping, would impact the average taxpayer, and whether the capping proposal that is being put forward by other groups and other parties in this House today would truly benefit the majority of taxpayers or perhaps only an affluent few?

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Let's put our cards right on the table. My dear friend the Conservative member from Erie—Lincoln likes a capping system—a 5% cap—and he sold it to his friend the Leader of the Opposition. We did a very careful analysis of it. Had it been a good system, we would have adopted it. But we analyzed it in detail. The fact is that a capping system tends to shift the property tax burden from those who are more affluent, those who have more money and those who have better houses, to those who are relatively less affluent and who have less capacity to pay taxes. That may be a good principle for the Progressive Conservative Party, but it is not a good principle for this government and the vast majority of the taxpayers in this province.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe—Grey): To the minister responsible for lotteries: The minister is expecting us to

take him at his word that where once he was blind, now he sees. The problem is that he should have seen a long time ago, and when he saw, he should have acted. But he didn't. He wants to us to believe he didn't see because he doesn't talk to his chief of staff. Well, that's just wrong and incredibly unbelievable to anyone in this House and anyone in Ontario.

We believe that he did see, and his failure to act is a simple, wilful act of negligence. For that, he should resign. Minister, will you do the honourable thing and step aside until this matter is totally cleared up?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I find it interesting: The member could turn to his left and ask the gentleman seated beside him, the member from Lanark—Carleton, who was in fact the minister between 2002 and 2003 when the Ombudsman identified a litany of problems. He could ask his colleague from Erie—Lincoln, Mr. Hudak, who was the minister for this corporation from 2000 to 2001, why they nurtured this culture of an organization—what actions they took or didn't take. The Ombudsman is incredibly critical during those years, and many others, of the actions which have ensued.

By contrast, the Ombudsman is quite complimentary—and I want to the member to know, because I'm sure he has not yet had a chance to read the Ombudsman's report. He says, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

There is a marked contrast between this member, his colleagues and the way they have treated these matters in the past, and myself, my colleagues in this government and the openness, transparency and action that we have taken.

Mr. Wilson: There certainly is a stark contrast. When ministers were under any type of suspicion on this side of the House, we did the honourable thing under the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government and we stepped aside. Every single one of us—and I was the first one to step aside as Minister of Health—did the honourable thing, went to the penalty box until things were cleared up. All of us were found to be not guilty of anything at all. It was your rat pack and you horrible Liberals, who have two standards in this House, who absolutely insisted that we step aside. So we respected parliamentary tradition, and we did so.

Now you've been caught by the Ombudsman; you've done nothing in your portfolio. The people of Ontario expect you to know what's going on, especially when millions and millions of dollars are at stake. You've done nothing. Will you at least do the honourable thing and step aside and resign your portfolio? Because obviously you have no honour in you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, Attorney General. Member for Renfrew, order.

The Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The “rat pack,” “horrible Liberals”—I understood that the leader of the official opposition was going to bring a new civility back to this House. Clearly, it is not in evidence here today.

I think we all understand the partisan nature of the member from Simcoe–Grey and the comments that he makes. Listen, I understand that; I am as partisan as the next member here, but the Ombudsman is not. The Ombudsman is unbiased. The Ombudsman is an independent officer of this Legislature, appointed by us all to render opinions and to make recommendations. In fact, he does not share the opinion of the member from Simcoe–Grey. He has quite a different outlook and understanding. He commends the actions of myself, the minister, and of the government in accepting and embracing his report. He commends us for the action which has ensued, for the “immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change.”

I know that the people of Ontario will see the comments that the member opposite makes for what they are—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the minister responsible for lottery and gaming: Sir, you were responsible for, amongst other things, Ontario lottery and gaming. And under your watch, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. suffers cultural decay, it engages in massive rip-offs to the tune of millions of dollars of innocent Ontarians. Under your watch, what are we to believe—that it was a matter of wilful blindness on your part, mere laziness, or outright incompetence, Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I understand the partisan nature of comments here, and I understand that the member from Niagara left of centre would never see things my way, but I do know that the member has a great deal of respect for André Marin, the Ombudsman of this Legislature. I do know that the member would want to reflect the comments of the Ombudsman, as delivered in his report yesterday. I know that the member opposite would want to be fair in his assessment. The Ombudsman says in a letter to me, “I am satisfied with the positive commitments made by the corporation and by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal to implement my recommendations,” but Mr. Marin went further. He said, “I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change.” I know that member from Niagara Centre would want to reflect that.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer given by the Minister of Government Services last Thursday to his question concerning slots and horse racing. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

1510

PETITIONS

SMITHS FALLS ECONOMY

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): This is a petition with regard to the Hershey chocolate plant closing in Smiths Falls and putting 500 people out of work. It recognizes that, as well, the McGuinty government has accelerated the closing of the Rideau Regional Centre, putting another 800 people out of work. These job losses total about 1,300.

The petitioners, some of the 6,000 people who have signed this petition, ask the Legislature this:

They want the government to continue with work with Hershey to reverse the decision;

They want the government to immediately fund infrastructure projects in Smiths Falls in order to attract new investment;

They want the government to complete the four-laning of Highway 7 and the reconstruction of Highway 15 at an accelerated pace;

They want the government to postpone the closure of Rideau Regional Centre at least until it has replaced the 800 jobs with an equal number of public sector jobs; and

They want the government of Ontario to create an equivalent to the northern Ontario heritage fund for eastern Ontario, which is suffering depopulation and economic hard times.

I have signed that petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I am pleased to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

“Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

“Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

“Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

“Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member’s motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature hereto.

GTA POOLING

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition appropriately entitled "End GTA Pooling: Pass Ontario Budget." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the city of Mississauga faces a long-term labour shortage, resulting in some 60,000 more people commuting into the city of Mississauga than leave Mississauga to earn their living and support their families each and every day; and

"Whereas 10 years ago the Ontario government of that day introduced the concept of GTA pooling, whereby funds are taken from the municipalities surrounding the city of Toronto and channelled into the city of Toronto without benefit or accountability to the taxpayers of those fast-growing cities, which face big-city needs and issues of their own; and

"Whereas GTA pooling places an additional tax burden on the municipal property tax bases of some \$40 million each and every year to the city of Mississauga; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario in its 2007-08 budget proposes to completely eliminate GTA pooling during a seven-year span beginning in fiscal year 2007-08, and that as pooling is phased out, Ontario will take responsibility for social assistance and social housing costs currently funded by GTA pooling;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties within the government of Ontario support the swift passage of the 2007-08 Ontario budget and ensure that its provisions ending GTA pooling are implemented."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and ask page Alex to carry it for me.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition to do with Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with the growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas studies indicate that overcrowded emergency rooms result in higher mortality rates; and

"Whereas growing demand and lack of availability of long-term-care beds place increased pressure on acute care beds; and

"Whereas the operating budget for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare must reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services for the people of Muskoka-East Parry Sound and allocate more long-term-care beds for Muskoka-East Parry Sound."

I support this petition.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have a petition, a very short one. It reads as follows:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

It is signed by a number of people, including the originator, Paul Taylor. I am in agreement with this and would sign my name thereto.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I have two petitions here that are identical to the one read by the member for Parkdale-High Park. They come from Chateau Gardens in Lancaster and Foyer St. Jacques in Embrun. I don't have to read it again, so I will give it to Emma to take to the Clerk.

STEVENSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital needs \$1.4 million in new funding over the next three years to get its birthing unit reopened and to ensure that they can recruit enough obstetricians and health care providers to supply a stable and ongoing service for expectant mothers in our area; and

"Whereas forcing expectant mothers to drive to Newmarket, Barrie or Orangeville to give birth is not only unacceptable, it is a potential safety hazard; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital cannot reopen the unit under its current budget and the McGuinty government has been unresponsive to repeated requests for new funding;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately provide the required \$1.4 million in new funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that the local birthing unit can reopen and so that mothers can give birth in Alliston."

Of course, I agree with that petition and I've signed it.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I'll sign this and send it down to the Clerk's table by way of page Carolyn.

GRAVESITES OF FORMER PREMIERS

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I have a petition here from members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premiers of Ontario have made enormous contributions over the years in shaping the Ontario of today; and

"Whereas, as a result, the final resting places of the 18 deceased Premiers are among the most historically significant sites in the province, but have yet to be officially recognized; and

"Whereas, were these gravesites to be properly maintained and marked with an historical plaque and a flag of Ontario, these locations would be a source of pride to the communities where these former Premiers lie buried, and provide potential points of interest for visitors;

"Now therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Enact Bill 25, an act that will preserve the gravesites of the former Premiers of Ontario."

As I agree with this petition, I shall affix my name and send it to the Clerk's table.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I affix my name and invite all to the meeting tonight to deal with this issue at Lakeridge.

1520

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I also have a petition regarding Lakeridge Health that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I agree with the petitioners and I've affixed my signature to this.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I keep getting petitions from the Consumer Federation of Canada to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services that read as follows:

"Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

"Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

"Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

"Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one's good credit rating;

"We, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated (masked-out) form, protecting our vital private information such as SIN and credit card numbers.

"(2) Should a credit bureau discover that there has been a breach of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the victimized consumer.

"(3) Credit bureaus should only report inquiries resulting out of actual applications for credit and for no other reasons.

"(4) Credit bureaus should investigate any complaints within 30 days and correct or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed or inaccurate."

Since I agree, I'm delighted to sign my name to this petition.

LABORATORY SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to do with lab services. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the residents of the communities served by Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare (MAHC) wish to maintain current community lab services; and

"Whereas maintaining community lab services promotes physician retention and benefits family health teams; and

"Whereas the funding for community lab services is currently a strain on the operating budget of MAHC; and

"Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with the growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

"Whereas the operating budget for MAHC needs to reflect the growing demand for services in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health increase the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to permit continued operation of community laboratory services."

I support this petition.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): I have a petition to present.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I agree with this petition and do affix my signature hereto.

GTA POOLING

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a petition here entitled "End Greater Toronto Area Pooling: Pass Ontario Budget." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the city of Mississauga faces a long-term labour shortage, resulting in some 60,000 more people commuting into the city of Mississauga than leave Mississauga to earn their living and support their families each and every day; and

"Whereas 10 years ago, the Ontario government of that day introduced the concept of" greater Toronto area pooling "whereby, funds are taken from the municipalities surrounding the city of Toronto and channelled into the city of Toronto without benefit or accountability to the taxpayers of those fast-growing cities, which face big-city needs and issues of their own; and

"Whereas" greater Toronto area "pooling places an additional tax burden on the municipal property tax bases of some \$40 million each and every year to the city of Mississauga; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario in its 2007-08 budget proposes to completely eliminate GTA pooling during a seven-year span beginning in the fiscal year 2007-08, and that as pooling is phased out Ontario will take responsibility for social assistance and social housing costs currently funded by greater Toronto area pooling.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties within the government of Ontario support the swift passage of the 2007-08 Ontario budget and ensure that its provisions ending" greater Toronto area pooling "are implemented."

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2007 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2007

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 26, 2007, on the amendment to the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I'm pleased to be able to speak to the budget on behalf of New Democrats because New Democrats have much to say about this latest McGuinty government "Don't believe it" budget, a budget which has or ought to have a stamp on it, "Best before October 11," a budget which many of us know will no longer have any validity after the next election because, what is this? After four years of Dalton McGuinty's breaking promise after promise after promise, what do we see in this budget? Dalton McGuinty once again making promise after promise after promise. But I suspect that people across Ontario know that Mr. McGuinty cannot be trusted to keep his promises, that this budget is essentially post-dated promises from a chronic promise breaker and that the promises that are there should be taken with huge dollops of salt.

C'est le grand budget incroyable de Dalton McGuinty. Après quatre années de promesses brisées par M. McGuinty, qu'est-ce qu'on voit aujourd'hui? On voit

encore plus de promesses, mais maintenant les Ontariens et Ontariennes savent qu'ils ne devraient pas croire les promesses de M. McGuinty.

Even as these promises are made, it is very clear that they fail the majority of working families across this province. It's interesting that Tom Parkinson gets \$5 million in punishment money from the McGuinty government for ripping off the customers of Hydro One. Dalton McGuinty gets an immediate \$40,000 pay raise. We just saw Duncan Brown get almost a million dollars in quiet money from the McGuinty government for his ill-gotten activities at the lottery corporation. But what are working people across Ontario told? They're told, "You wait. You wait three years. You wait four years. You wait five years." In fact, Premier McGuinty is telling today's working families—women, young people, new Canadians—"If you want fairness, if you want to see some action under the McGuinty government, you'll have to wait another three or five years." Who got the swift action? The Premier got a \$40,000 pay increase in a special extended session of the Legislature just before Christmas.

Before addressing the specifics of the budget, I'd like to take a moment to reflect a bit on what this budget says about the current political situation here in Ontario in the spring of 2007. On the one hand, today we have the McGuinty Liberals who are completely out of touch with ordinary working families, a government that breaks promises time and time again to ordinary folks who, by and large, are working longer and harder than ever and, at the end of the month when they add up the bills, often find themselves under more pressure.

1530

This is the history of this government, breaking promise after promise to hard-working people.

The promise to freeze hydro rates: Instead, you go across this province and most people will tell you that their hydro bill has doubled.

The promise to end the clawback, to stop taking \$1,500 a year away from the poorest kids in this province: Here we are, four years later, and the McGuinty government is still taking \$1,500 a year away from the poorest kids in the province, and next year, the McGuinty government will continue to take money away from those kids. And the year after that, the McGuinty government will continue to take money away from those, the poorest kids, and the year after that and the year after that. As I said, this is a government that is very out of touch with the economic reality that so many people are struggling with in Ontario today.

New Democrats know this is wrong. I know, having been from one end of Ontario to the other, how difficult life has become under the McGuinty government for ordinary working families. I also know the values of fairness, decency and, most importantly, people's sense that a fair day's work deserves a fair day's pay. I know from talking to people how much they want to see policies, strategies implemented which address those values and those needs.

Over the past few days, I've read and reread the budget and listened to quite a few of the budget-related remarks of the Minister of Finance and the Premier. When you read the headlines of this budget, it is again oh, so clear that the McGuinty government's budget fails working families and that its promises fail working families.

As I said, the McGuinty government gives a \$5-million payment to Tom Parkinson at Hydro One after he takes advantage of Hydro One consumers. It gives almost a \$1-million payment to Duncan Brown at the lottery corporation after he presides over fraudulent activities, where innocent people are cheated out of millions of dollars in winnings. The Premier himself gives himself a \$40,000 pay increase, but working families are told that they should wait and they should wait. As I say, this is not a budget that reflects the everyday concerns of Ontario's hard-working families, and it is certainly not a budget that New Democrats can support.

I want to talk now about some specifics: minimum wage. You see, here is the irony, the contrast: The Premier gives himself a \$40,000-a-year instant pay increase, but says to the 1.2 million working people across this province who work for under \$10 an hour, "You wait three years for a \$10 minimum wage." What's going to happen in those three years? Well, I can tell you. The hydro bill is going to go up again. The natural gas bill is going to go up. The rent bill is going to go up. Transit fees are going to go up. Property taxes are going to go up. Tuition fees are going to go up. People who are struggling now on \$8, \$9 or \$9.50 an hour are going to find themselves even more behind the eight ball. They're going to find themselves struggling more than ever. The McGuinty government that wants to keep the lowest-paid workers in poverty now is going to ensure that three years from now, they're still living in poverty, but instant action for the Premier, an instant \$5 million for the Premier's friend Tom Parkinson, and Duncan Brown, who presided over fraud after fraud after fraud at the Ontario lottery corporation under the McGuinty government, an instant millionaire.

Let me be clear. The 1.2 million people who work for under \$10 an hour now can't wait three years to pay their hydro bill. Nobody says to them, "Oh, we're going to wait three years before you pay your hydro bill." They can't wait three years before they pay their heating bill. They can't wait three years before they pay their rent. They can't wait three years before they pay the dental bill for their kids. They can't wait three years before they pay the tuition fee bill. They can't do any of those things. They can't go to the grocery store and purchase groceries and say, "I'll be back to pay you when the McGuinty government raises the minimum wage to \$10 an hour three years from now." They have to live today. They have to struggle today. They have to try to make ends meet today. Many of these families are working one job during the day, one job during the evening, and another job on the weekend trying to make ends meet. And you know what the McGuinty government says? The Mc-

McGuinty government says, "You wait three years before we have anything approaching a decent minimum wage in the province of Ontario."

The McGuinty government wants to go out and cheer about this. The McGuinty government wants people to believe that forcing the lowest-paid workers in this province, 1.2 million of them, to wait three years before there's anything approaching a decent minimum wage. They want people to think that somehow the McGuinty government has given them a great gift.

Forcing people to continue to struggle in poverty when they get up every day and go to work and make their contribution to society—they work hard, not just once a day but in many cases, as I say, at three different jobs. Forcing them to continue to live in poverty, as the McGuinty government is doing, is disgraceful—disgraceful.

The fact of the matter is that many of these parents have to support kids. They're trying to, as I say, put food on the table, pay the rent and put clothing on their children. In fact, there are many other parents across this province who struggle. Some of them may have to rely on Ontario Works part of the time, or they rely on part-time jobs—minimum wage in combination with Ontario Works. For the last four years, the McGuinty government has been taking \$1,500 a year per child away from those. It's \$1,500 that the federal government, under the national child benefit supplement, provides to those kids. The federal government recognizes that there's a problem with child poverty. They recognize that there are literally tens of thousands of kids in this province growing up in poverty, so the federal government says, "Here is the national child benefit supplement," \$1,500 a year per child to help these kids and their families rise above poverty. And what has the McGuinty government been doing? They've been clawing that money back. Imagine, clawing back—and it amounts to \$250 million. This government has been taking \$250 million a year for the last four years away from the poorest kids in the province. It amounts to \$1,500 a year.

Now, what was the big announcement in the budget that the McGuinty government is applauding themselves on the shoulder for? The big announcement in the budget is that next year, instead of taking \$1,500 dollars a year away from these kids, they're only going to take \$1,250 a year away from these kids. It's like an extortionist. It's like Tony Soprano taking your money one day and then the next week he comes and takes a little less and says, "You should thank me. I'm your best friend. I'm only stealing this amount of money from you now instead of the full amount."

1540

That is the travesty here. The McGuinty government wants to be applauded, because instead of taking \$1,500 a year away from the poorest kids, they said, "Hey, we're going to be nice to you. We're only going to take \$1,250 a year away from you, the poorest kids in the province."

And under the McGuinty government this passes for good social policy? The McGuinty government wants you to believe that this is progressive, positive, forward-

looking social policy, that it is somehow going to alleviate poverty when the McGuinty government takes \$1,250 a year away from the poorest kids? Disgraceful. I think any reasonable person would look at this and say, "Disgraceful." People would say, "Why is the McGuinty government, which can afford to shower the chief executive officer of Hydro One with \$5 million after he ripped off Hydro One customers, which gives the head of the Ontario lottery corporation almost \$1 million after he presided over millions of dollars of fraud, applauding itself because now it is only going to take \$1,250 a year away from the poorest kids in the province?" I think any rational, reasonable person would look at this and say, "This is deplorable. When so many kids are living in poverty, this is deplorable."

I want to also talk about some of the things that are happening to our municipalities. One of the promises Dalton McGuinty made was that he was going to stop the downloading, that the McGuinty government was going to reverse the downloading, that municipalities would not be forced to use what is, we all admit, a negative and regressive tax, the property tax, to cover provincial responsibilities like health care, social assistance, seniors' housing and social housing. Dalton McGuinty said he was going to end that downloading to municipalities.

Well, what did we see on the day of the budget? We saw the mayor of Toronto, David Miller, not alone but with many other mayors in the province, saying, "The province is a delinquent debtor. The province isn't paying for their responsibilities. The province isn't paying for Ontario disability support. The province isn't paying for Ontario Works. The province is forcing municipalities to pay."

Here's what I think is the really nasty part of this: These are people who are forced to rely upon Ontario disability support benefits, people who cannot work. They are people who cannot work. They are forced to live on a benefit that is far below the poverty line, and similarly with Ontario Works. Go to any community in Ontario and talk with one of the social workers who works in the Ontario Works system or the Ontario disability support plan, and they will tell you, "Here's what an apartment costs to rent. Here's what it costs for food. Here's what it costs to pay the hydro bill. Here's what it costs to pay the heating bill. There is no way that someone can survive on Ontario disability support plan benefits or Ontario Works benefits." But what does the McGuinty government do? Besides enforcing benefits that are so meagre, that fall far below the poverty line, they don't even pay the bill themselves. They force municipalities to pay the bill.

That will continue under this budget. In fact, under this budget, that will continue not just this year but years into the future.

I also want to talk about the issue of jobs—work—because wherever I go across Ontario, the vast majority of people say, "I want to work." Even people who cannot work, if you engage them in a conversation, they'll say, "I'd like to be able to work." People want to be able to

work. People want to be able to find a job so they can sustain themselves, sustain their family and make a contribution to their community. But what has happened over the last three years under the McGuinty government? What we've seen is the destruction of 140,000 good-paying jobs in the manufacturing sector and in the forest sector.

I'll tell you, no part of the province has been hit harder than northern Ontario. It's not as if forest sector communities in northern Ontario suddenly don't have a product the world is interested in. We're going to continue, as far as I can tell, to use lumber to build homes. In fact, we continue to have a chronic housing shortage in much of North America. We're going to continue to use paper. There are more books being printed than ever before. If you consider there are 1.4 billion people living in China and 1.1 billion in India, and their literacy rates are getting higher and higher, more people are going to read books, newspapers and magazines. Forest sector jobs in northern Ontario aren't being lost because somehow the world stopped using wood or paper; no. Forest sector jobs are being destroyed there because the McGuinty government has decided to drive the industrial hydro rate through the roof.

What is really sad about this is that the forest sector came here to Queen's Park almost three years ago during the Bill 100 hearings and they said to the McGuinty government, "We have looked at your Bill 100 proposal and we have looked at what it means. We can tell you that it's going to drive the industrial hydro rate through the roof. We can tell you that if you do this, you are going to close literally dozens of paper mills, pulp mills, derivative saw mills, OSB mills and plywood mills, and you're going to destroy tens of thousands of jobs." They laid it out. They actually said, "This is what will go first; this is what will be destroyed second; this is what will be destroyed third," and they said that in the end, it will be tens of thousands of jobs. They were pleading with the McGuinty government, "Don't do this at a time when we face other kinds of cost pressures. Don't do this, because it will destroy tens of thousands of jobs." Did the McGuinty government listen? Did the McGuinty government pay any attention? Did the McGuinty government show any sensitivity to these workers, to these communities? No. The McGuinty government, as part of policy, drove the industrial hydro rate through the roof.

Do you know what the real travesty is? Many of these mills are located on rivers in northern Ontario where there's a hydro dam that produces some of the lowest-cost electricity—not just the lowest-cost electricity in Ontario, not just the lowest-cost electricity in Canada, not just the lowest-cost electricity in North America, but some of these mills are located on rivers immediately adjacent to hydro dams where they produce some of the lowest-cost electricity in the world. Some of these mills are located directly beside hydro dams that produce electricity for about one cent a kilowatt hour. But the McGuinty government forces these mills to pay in the range of seven cents a kilowatt hour for that electricity.

Meanwhile, mills that are located in Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia or now even in the Carolinas pay three, three and a half or four cents a kilowatt hour. So companies are saying, "We're going to close our operation in Ontario and we're going to move the production to Quebec. We'll move it to British Columbia, we'll move it to Manitoba, we'll move it to Minnesota, or we'll move it to North Carolina or South Carolina." That is how tens of thousands of jobs are being destroyed.

Here's just one example from my constituency. Kenora was a newsprint mill that had a dedicated market. The Minneapolis Star Tribune said, "We want to purchase this newsprint." They had experienced workers, very knowledgeable workers. They're located in the middle of the forest that they use to produce the paper, so their timber, their wood fibre, was economical: a good workforce, a good market that they can rely on.

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You know what else? The Kenora mill was surrounded by no less than five hydro dams—five of them. The Kenora mill was literally drowning in the lowest-cost electricity in the world. But do you know what the McGuinty government said? They said, "If you want that electricity," which can be produced for one cent a kilowatt hour, "you have to pay seven cents a kilowatt hour." Do you know what the company that owned the mill said? They said, "We're out of here." They closed the mill—over 400 jobs gone. Four hundred jobs gone as a result of wrong-headed policy on the part of the McGuinty government.

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): Tell the whole story, Howard.

Mr. Hampton: I notice that one of the members for Thunder Bay has a lot to say here. Maybe he can go back to Thunder Bay and tell the workers at Cascades why they're out of work, tell the workers at Abitibi why they're out of work, tell the workers in Red Rock why they're out of work, and tell the workers in Longlac why they're out of work, instead of apologizing for the McGuinty government. Maybe you can tell the thousands of workers in your riding why you're defending the McGuinty government policy of driving hydro rates through the roof and destroying thousands of forest sector jobs in your own riding.

While you're at it, maybe you can tell those workers what they should do now when their homes are worth a fraction of what they used to be worth. These are workers who paid their taxes. Some of them have worked 25 or 30 years. They've made solid contributions to the community. They know that the reason they are losing their jobs is because there's a McGuinty government at Queen's Park here that frankly doesn't care about them and that should have known from the representations of the forest sector three years ago that driving industrial hydro rates through the roof was going to kill thousands of jobs.

I want you to know what New Democrats think. New Democrats believe that if you're located immediately beside a hydro dam that produces electricity for some of

the lowest costs in the world, that's a natural advantage that you should be able to take advantage of. That's something nature has given your part of Ontario, and you should be able to take advantage of it to sustain jobs and sustain communities. But that's just beyond the grasp of the McGuinty government, far beyond the grasp of the McGuinty government, that a paper mill that is located right beside a hydro dam that produces some of the lowest-cost electricity in the world should be able to take advantage of that natural condition in order to sustain jobs.

I know you know what I'm speaking about, Speaker, because Espanola is in your riding, and Nairn Centre, which has lost a sawmill, part of the derivative loss, is in your riding, and sawmills in Chapleau. So you know from your own constituency exactly what I'm speaking about.

But it's not just the forest sector; it's also the manufacturing sector. We have watched as literally tens of thousands of jobs are being destroyed in the auto parts sector, and the response of the McGuinty government is to say, "Well, maybe in 2009 or 2010, some of these jobs are going to be replaced." It's the old McGuinty promise again: "Sorry you lost your job today. I feel bad that you lost your job today. I feel your pain that you lost your job today. But maybe in 2009 or 2010 there will be some jobs to replace it."

I ask, on behalf of those workers, how are they supposed to pay the bills in 2007? How are they supposed to put their kids through college or university in 2008? How are they supposed to survive through 2009? You know what? There is no answer from the McGuinty government other than, "I feel your pain." I think we deserve to get something more than "I feel your pain" from a government. I can purchase a card at one of these card stores for \$1.50 that says, "I feel your pain." Surely we deserve something more from the McGuinty government than simply a Premier who trots around the province saying, "I feel your pain. I feel your pain. I feel your pain." What did we get in this budget? We got nothing for the forest sector. We got nothing for the tens of thousands of people and dozens of communities that are losing their jobs in the forest sector. What did the McGuinty government do in terms of the tens of thousands of workers who have lost their jobs in the auto sector? Well, there is something called the Ontario Manufacturing Council. Do you know what I suspect this is going to do? I suspect that several members of the McGuinty government are all going to get together and say, "I feel your pain. I feel your pain. I feel your pain." But workers who have lost their jobs, hard-working families who are looking at the loss of their livelihood, got nothing, nada from this budget from the McGuinty government.

I want to talk just a bit about what is happening in the agricultural sector. In farm after farm across this province, what we know is this: More and more farm families are being pushed to the edge of the cliff. But it's not just farm families. Now it's the farm supplier, the person who sells implements to the farm—all those people who make

up so many of the rural towns and villages in this province. They are also being pushed further and further to the edge. Was there anything that addresses their struggle in this budget? Sad to say, there was next to nothing.

What is remarkable is that I look across to the province of Quebec. The province of Quebec, on its own, has implemented a risk management strategy so that farmers do not have to carry the risk of currency change; they don't have to carry the risk of gasoline or fuel prices going higher; they don't have to carry the risk of the Canadian dollar versus the American dollar; they don't have to carry the risk of weather or climate change. They don't have to carry all those risks on their own backs by themselves. There is a recognition in Quebec that Quebec, as a society, should help farmers address some of those risks, that there is a social responsibility to help farmers address some of those risks. If you go into rural Quebec, what you find is a very vibrant place. Rural Quebec is quite vibrant. I wish I could say the same today for Ontario. As I have visited communities in rural Ontario, what I increasingly find is a sense of desperation.

But Quebec is not alone. Alberta has done the same thing. They have implemented a risk management strategy that says that Alberta, as a society, has a responsibility to ensure that farmers are not left out there on their own, that there is a provincial responsibility to help sustain rural Alberta. Do you find anything like that in Ontario today? No. In fact, what you find is a McGuinty government that is busy cutting school funding to rural school boards and northern school boards.

That was one of other revelations in the budget. The McGuinty government says, "We're going to put some money into schools." So I got on the phone to school boards across northern Ontario. Are they going to see any additional money? No. They're actually going to see less. They're actually going to be forced to close schools. They're actually going to be forced to eat up what little financial reserves they have.

The attitude of the McGuinty government seems to be that people who live in rural Ontario and northern Ontario should move to Toronto. That seems to be the approach of the McGuinty government. In fact, the Minister of Natural Resources actually got caught in that just a few months ago. When confronted with yet another paper mill closure, do you know what his response was? His response was that maybe people who work in the northern Ontario forest sector should just give up. I can tell you how that remark was greeted in northern Ontario, because one of the realities is that people who live in rural and northern Ontario—they don't all want to live in Toronto; they don't all want to live in Mississauga; they don't all want to live in Richmond Hill. They want to live in rural Ontario and northern Ontario. But what they wish they had is a government that cared about economic conditions in rural Ontario and northern Ontario. I can tell you that there is absolutely no indication in this budget that the McGuinty government cares for one second about northern Ontario and rural Ontario.

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Oh, I know, I know—I hear the announcements and the re-announcements: the forest sector, again. The McGuinty government says, “We have invested \$1 billion in the forest sector.” Well, \$250 million of that is supposed to be loan guarantees—loan guarantees to which company after company has said, “No thanks, no thanks.” Another \$500 million is supposed to be a reinvestment strategy. I go across northern Ontario and I talk to this paper mill, that paper mill, this community leader, and I say, “Have you seen any of this money?” “No—haven’t seen any of it.”

So yes, the McGuinty government is very good at making announcements and re-announcements as paper mill after paper mill, pulp mill after pulp mill, sawmill after sawmill, plywood mill after plywood mill, OSB mill after OSB mill closes—meaningless announcements that make no difference. That is what people saw and will continue to see in this budget.

I also want to point out to people what was in the budget in respect to the environment, because I remember a year ago that the Premier said the reason he wasn’t closing that big coal-fired plant at Nanticoke—the biggest polluter in Ontario—was because he hadn’t received the \$573 million from the federal government to address climate change, and he made a big thing of it. He said over and over again, “Well, if I had that \$573 million from the federal government, we’d be closing this coal plant like Nanticoke.” That was his excuse for breaking his coal promise for the third time.

What happened this spring? What happened is this: The federal government turned over the \$573 million of federal money to deal with climate change which the Premier said was there to be used to close down Nanticoke. Did we see an announcement in the budget that Nanticoke—the biggest generator of greenhouse gas in Ontario, the biggest air polluter in Ontario—was going to close? Not at all; not at all. Oh, we saw some meagre announcements about, “Well, there might be \$2 million to plant more trees.”

Let me put that in context. Today, the forest renewal trust fund generates over \$100 million to plant trees, and the forestry futures fund generates over \$10 million to plant trees. That’s a total of \$110 million a year. And the McGuinty government says, “Oh, we’ve put \$2 million towards planting trees. We’ve done something huge for the environment.” What is that—about 2%? This is the McGuinty government contribution to the environment: 1% here and 2% here. That is the McGuinty government contribution to the environment in this budget.

I do want to note one of the tax changes, because this is really interesting in the context of the budget. We all know that north of the 51st parallel in northern Ontario probably has some of the best undeveloped mineral resources yet remaining on the planet. If you look at the gold that’s come out of the ground in places like Red Lake and Pickle Lake, the gold that has come out of the ground in Kirkland Lake, the gold that has come out of the ground in the neighbourhood of Wawa, the nickel and

copper that have come out of the ground in Sudbury and the minerals that have come out of the ground in places like Timmins and Cobalt, there is literally a belt that goes across northern Ontario that has generated tens of billions of dollars of wealth.

But we know that there is much more wealth above that. Who are the people who live north of the 51st parallel? They’re virtually all aboriginal people. You might find the odd non-native pilot flying around if you go to a First Nations community, you might find one or two non-native teachers and you might find one or two non-native nurses, but 99% of the people who live north of the 51st parallel are aboriginal people.

Two years ago they came to the McGuinty government and said, “We see that you want to proceed with mining development north of the 51st parallel. We have some issues we would like to discuss on that, but we would like to see some revenue sharing.” They pointed out, “You know, we are amongst the poorest of the poor in terms of income in Ontario.” Some of these communities have unemployment rates of 80%, 85%. Many other people survive on very minimal incomes. So what they said to the McGuinty government is, “If you are going to proceed with mining development north of the 51st parallel, we think there should be some revenue sharing with First Nations. Yes, the federal government will get your taxes, the provincial government will get your taxes and royalties, but as a matter of decency, as a matter of social and economic justice, our people, who are amongst the poorest in Canada, the poorest in Ontario, think they deserve to share in some of the revenue that is going to be generated.” Do you know what the McGuinty government said? Again, these are some of the poorest people in Canada. The McGuinty government literally slammed the door and said, “No, we are not doing that. We can’t afford to do that.”

Here is the irony in this budget. As you will know, De Beers is proceeding in Attawapiskat with the Victor project, which is a diamond mine. It’s been under development for many years now. The royalty rate north of the 50th parallel is 5%, so De Beers said that the royalty rate on these diamonds will be 5%. First Nations were told, “No, no, there’s no money for you in this. There’s no revenue sharing for you.” But do you know what the McGuinty government did in this budget, after telling First Nations, the poorest people in Ontario, “There’s no money for you”? They went to De Beers and said, “The royalty rate is now being increased from 5% to 13%, none for the First Nations.” None. The McGuinty government wants it all for its own pockets. After all, you know, the McGuinty government has to pay \$5 million to the Premier’s friend Tom Parkinson, and it has to pay \$1 million to the now-disgraced chief executive officer at the Ontario lotteries corporation. Gee, if you’re going to be paying out money like that to the government’s friends, maybe you need to drive the royalty rate up from 5% to 13%.

But don’t you think that those aboriginal people who live there, who live within a few kilometres of that mine,

who are the only people who live there, deserve a share of that revenue as well? According to the McGuinty government that wants to pat itself on the back and say that it has at last heard the voices of people who are living in poverty, those aboriginal people are not supposed to receive anything.

Do you know the even bigger travesty? And this is what I think sticks in the craw of the mining company: The royalty increase only applies to the diamond mine. Somebody could build a gold mine right beside the diamond mine and the royalty rate would still be only 5%. So the people who have invested now hundreds of millions of dollars in developing the diamond mine are saying, "Well, isn't this a bit unfair? Why should somebody else be able to come along and take advantage of the road infrastructure that we've built and everything that we've put into this and the work we've done with the First Nation, and they would only pay a 5% royalty rate?"

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These are questions that I hope the McGuinty government, at some point, has the courage to answer. I especially want to hear the answer for First Nations. I especially want to hear the answer for those First Nations communities who are amongst the lowest income in the province, who just months ago were told by the McGuinty government, "If mining development proceeds in the north, there is no revenue sharing for you," but the McGuinty government in this budget just reaches in and takes a further 8% for itself. I don't think there's any social or economic justice there. I don't think there's any fairness there. This is, plain and simple, the McGuinty government looking after itself and First Nations getting the back of the hand.

These are issues that I think need to be raised in this budget. These are issues that needed to be addressed, but unfortunately, they're not going to be addressed.

What does this budget mean at the end of the day for hard-working people across the province? Is it going to reduce tuition fees at colleges and universities? No. Is it going to do something to address the hydro bill that increases? No. Is it going to do something for those people who are working hard on the minimum wage? Well, maybe it might do something three years from now, but in the meantime it's going to force those people to work longer and harder for incomes that are simply not adequate. Is it going to do something for those people who need access to regulated child care? No, it's not going to do much there either. In fact, once again the McGuinty government is sitting on about \$140 million of federal money for child care and there's no sign of it being used for child care in this budget.

So I would say this: For the average working person across this province who gets up every day, puts in a fair day's work and all they expect is a fair day's pay, who pays their taxes, looks after their family and makes a contribution to the community, is there much in this budget for them? No. There's not much this week, there's not going to be much six months from now, and there's

not going to be anything a year from now. That's why I say that this is a budget that fails working families across this province. And as is so typical of the McGuinty government, it is heavy on media spin, it is very heavy on promises, but we already see that it fails to deliver.

For that reason, New Democrats will not be supporting this budget. New Democrats cannot, will not support a budget that fails working families across this province.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe you would want to know that we have in our members' gallery four long-time, lifelong social justice activists: Vince Baldo, Ann Blair, Ron Boyer and Helen Santek.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I look forward to joining in the debate on our 2007-08 budget. I've had the opportunity over the past two days to listen intently to both the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the third party. I just want to begin, though, with a little bit of a compare and contrast, a quick look back in history, because a lot of discussion is around, "Well, you said you were going to do this and you haven't accomplished that, and you haven't spent enough there and it's taking too long to spend here."

I recall from my municipal days, from the time the third party was in government—I can't recall them promising a social contract and tearing up all the contracts across the province of Ontario in the public sector. I can't remember them promising they were going to reduce people's salaries by about 5% or 6% in the public sector clear across the province. I don't remember that as a campaign promise that they made to the people of Ontario. And I can't recall, when the Conservative government was in power some eight years ago, during that period of time, that they said that—I think it was a pinky swear.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Order out there.

Mr. Arthurs: I think it was a pinky swear that the municipal-provincial review swap of services would be revenue-neutral. I think that was a pinky swear, if I recall. That one sort of stuck. Some things kind of stick with you during periods of time. I don't think that municipalities asking for an upload of services resulted at that time in that exchange being revenue-neutral, or I don't think they would be calling for those uploads of services.

I want to look at where we are now and maybe where we were then. Our first budget focused on health care in the province of Ontario as a part of a theme over a four-year plan. You know, it's not hard not to have a wait time if you go to a hospital that's been closed; there are no wait times at closed hospitals. Just ask. Drive to Whitby. You can drive to Whitby now and go to a hospital that used to be there under the former government, and you've got no wait times because there's nobody there. There's no hospital; a closed hospital. There are no wait times at a closed hospital.

So we invested heavily in health care, and we continue to do that. I only need look to my own riding to see the approvals on the much needed and long-awaited redevelopment of the Ajax-Pickering site of the Rouge Valley Health System.

In our second budget, we concentrated on education and a Reaching Higher program. I recall in the municipal elections of 1997—right in the dead of the campaign during a province-wide teacher work stoppage—I recall that work stoppage was caused, in part, by a minister of the day who said he would create a crisis in education and was successful in doing that.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): That was the Oklahoma cowboy.

Mr. Arthurs: The Oklahoma cowboy. We're putting that, and have been putting that, back together. The success we've been achieving in that was recognized in the colleges and universities across the province. Their biggest challenge right now, with our support, is meeting the needs and the demands and desire of young people to have the opportunity to attend to post-secondary opportunities.

In our third budget, we concentrated to a large extent on infrastructure. We supported our municipal partners in beginning to put back together the roads and the bridges and the water and sewer system that's been so sorely neglected over a number of years. Over the entire time, we've been investing in public transit, something the provincial government moved away from steadily from the late 1980s or early 1990s onward.

We made a commitment to invest in public transit and during the first three years moved to that point where they're receiving two cents per litre of gas tax in addition to monies that, in part, both the former and current federal government have supported, and have moved that money through to them, as well as additional funding that has gone to the municipalities to re-engage in the business of public transit, because we recognized how important it is.

In this budget, we're concentrating on bringing some social justice to the province. Now, we can't do everything, obviously—no government can—for everyone in the way that anyone would like. The Ontario child benefit, over the course of the next four years, as it's fully implemented, will put some \$2.1 billion into the hands of families in Ontario, both those who are working—probably at the lower end of the economic scale of the workforce—and those who find themselves not in a position to be able to work. So both the children of those who are working and those children of families who are unable to work will benefit from an Ontario child benefit.

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This is a seismic shift, a paradigm shift, in how we deal with children, how we build them up and how we support them in families to lift them from where they are and have them have the opportunity to experience exactly the same things as children in middle income families, the same opportunities to learn and ultimately move on to

post-secondary education, and have the success in the workplace that their parents may not have experienced.

I come from a family that moved here from the East Coast when my mother was in her early 20s. My grandparents and great-grandparents were coal miners in Springhill, Nova Scotia. My mother and her brothers and sisters, one at a time, she leading, moved to Ontario, where there was opportunity. The family followed, particularly with the mine disasters that occurred in the late '50s. But, being here from a family that didn't come with very much, I have had the opportunity, because of the opportunities they created, to gain a secondary and post-secondary education, and to teach and be engaged in public service. I would like to think that every young person in this province, regardless of the income of their parents, would have those kinds of opportunities presented to them. The Ontario child benefit will help to achieve that.

We are investing, in this budget, in those in our society who find themselves unable to work as a result of injury. On January 1 next year, WSIB payments will increase by 2.5%; in July of next year, a further 2.5%; and in the following July a further 2.5%. We recognize that in a socially just community, you have to take care of those who can't take care of themselves, and that includes injured workers. Would we all like to be able to do more for those who find themselves unable to work in other circumstances, whether through Ontario Works or through ODSP? There is probably not a member of the House who wouldn't like to do more. The fact of the matter is that over the course of the past three years, over the mandate, we put a further 7% in total into those payments, spread out in three components of, if I recall, 3%, 2% and 2%.

We're recognizing those in our community who find themselves vulnerable and need our support. I had our local legal aid community in to see me just a few weeks ago, prior to the budget, requesting that in this budget we recognize the needs of legal aid. We recognize that those who find themselves, again, in a financial situation where they can't afford to achieve legal assistance, those who need to be able to get support from a parent when one parent is taking care of the children and the other has left the home—and that system needed our support. Over the next three years, we'll be investing some \$51 million to ensure that those who are more marginalized and somewhat less able to seek out and have the support of the legal system—those monies will be available to them.

We've committed, over four years, some \$200 million to the developmental services sector. I can think of no part of our community that is more vulnerable than those who have the challenges that come with developmental disabilities, particularly those in their adult years, those who have aging parents. Those parents say to us, "What is going to happen to my adult child when I'm not here or not able to take care of them? Will society be there to support them? Will the resources be there to support them? Will we have ensured that they will have a dignity of life that we try to provide as parents?" We recognize

that in investing some \$200 million over four years to build on that system.

So the budget is full of initiatives. It's focusing on the needs of the people of Ontario. The needs of those who are vulnerable in Ontario are only one small piece of the entire budget. I hope, as the debate goes on over the next days, that members will have a chance to focus on the budget that speaks to the people of Ontario.

In the few minutes that I've taken here this afternoon, I wanted principally to talk about those in our community who are vulnerable, about the need for governments to have a responsiveness, to have some social justice in what they do. That includes those children who find themselves somewhat marginalized, those who don't have the advantages that you or I may or may not have had, those who find themselves in developmental challenges and are unable to take care of themselves, those who find themselves injured in the workplace and need our continued support, those who are unable to work, for whatever reasons, and need our support and those who are disabled for other reasons and continue to need our support.

This is one step as part of a program. It is the fourth of four budgets in a four-year plan that has dealt with health, education and future opportunities and now is dealing with the need for social justice here in Ontario. I'm proud to be a member of this government and pleased to have been a part of the development of the budget as a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance and look forward to debate and look forward, I hope, with the support of this House, to seeing these measures implemented for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It is my pleasure to speak to the budget bill debate. I heard the leader of the third party and also the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge. They have two different views on the budget and I'm certainly going to add a third. I can tell you about the absolute total disappointment of people in rural Ontario with this budget. If I were a Liberal member representing rural Ontario, I'd be very concerned. I'd be very concerned that my Premier has decided that those seats are expendable in order to win the big prize that he's hoping for in October. There is simply nothing in that budget for the people in rural Ontario.

For example, communities have been asking for initiatives from this government. The federal government does more for rural communities than this government does. The gas tax revenue that is shared with rural communities from the federal government goes to all rural communities to assist them in their infrastructure projects. But what do rural communities get from the provincial government? Absolutely nothing; no share whatsoever of the gas tax revenue. That is one major issue that they've been campaigning for for a number of years. In fact, I introduced a private member's bill to that effect to this House

and it is yet to be brought forward by the government. But we had some hope that they would actually do something on that front in this budget. The unified chorus on the part of rural communities that they should be getting a share of that gas tax has been very resounding towards this government, and I hope they would start to listen.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): It's a pleasure to respond to the comments that were made by the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge. I heard him use terms like "social justice" and the government being worried about children on the margin. Where has the government been for the last three and a half years when we were looking at the rates of poverty in this province, which have been growing under the Liberals, not declining?

Do you know when the government started thinking about poverty? It was about one week before the election in York South–Weston that it became so painfully clear to the spin doctors in the Premier's office that the \$10 minimum wage now had lots of resonance with voters in that riding because it is one of the poorest ridings in the province of Ontario. All of a sudden you see a headline and you hear the finance minister say, "This budget is going to be about poverty." The headline lasted about as long as that day because, when you get to this budget, what do you see? Well, the promise that the Premier made in 2003 to end the clawback, the one he still hasn't lived up to—well, he won't live up to that for another five full years. A child born in the year that Mr. McGuinty made the promise that he would end the clawback is going to be eight years old before they see the full benefit.

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This government alleges—pretends—that it's concerned about poverty when it steals \$225 million from the poorest kids in the province of Ontario every year? You've got the gall to stand up here and say you're worried about poverty? You're worried about polls; you're worried about the result in York South–Weston. You don't care about kids; you're just trying to salvage some votes, because for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Would the House please come to order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Nickel Belt, please come to order. The member for Essex, please come to order. The member for Ottawa Centre, please come to order.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Will the member for Nickel Belt please come to order.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's a pleasure to follow the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, whose informed comments are always interesting to listen to. I'd like to talk about some of the things that he referred to which the leader of the NDP raised. In fact, the leader of the NDP called this an election budget. But from where I sit, we have actually had four election bud-

gets. The one in 2004 was all about health care and fulfilled the government's commitment in health care. In 2005, higher education: That fulfilled the government's commitments to Ontario and higher education. In 2006, it was transportation and infrastructure. Certainly coming from Mississauga, that was a godsend to us. And this year, we have, finally, a balanced budget and a budget that addresses the needs of Ontario's truly needy.

The leader of the NDP, by clearly implying that he would not enact the measures in this budget, is probably telling Ontarians that he wouldn't, if given another chance, balance the budget as our government is doing. The party that added more than \$45 billion of public debt in just five seemingly endless years of government has a leader who is promising Ontarians more of the same—\$45 billion.

The leader of the NDP just can't learn. Ontarians want a government that does well what government ought to do. That's what the 2007-08 budget delivers. It is the second consecutive balanced budget. Without using Ontario's reserves, Ontario should now move into an era of sustainable surpluses, a far cry from the NDP era, when Ontarians today are still paying taxes to clean up the mess that the leader of the NDP left.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It is my pleasure to add comments to the speech from the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge on the budget. I believe that the people of Ontario should be asking themselves what they are getting for the \$22 billion a year in additional spending that this government is involved with in this \$91-billion budget.

I would like to point out that the debt has grown some \$13 billion under the watch of this government, so that now the total debt is some \$157.1 billion. The interest on that debt has grown to some \$9.1 billion a year. That money, that \$9.1 billion a year, is being spent servicing the debt—the mortgage for the province, if you will. That's money that's spent on interest instead of being used for programs.

Yet rural Ontario was somehow forgotten in this budget. Ministries like the Ministry of Natural Resources, when you look at last year's interim spending versus this year's budget, their interim spending went down some \$36 million. Tourism spending is down. Agriculture, even if the ministry matches the federal government's recent announcement, will be down some \$100 million. So rural Ontario seems to have been forgotten.

Long-term care: The government still hasn't kept its promise of \$6,000 per resident in funding. In fact, the budget announced some 50 cents per resident, which will add a minute to the time that people will receive in terms of care in long-term-care homes. The government still hasn't kept that broken promise of \$6,000 per resident of long-term-care homes.

So this budget has been quite a disappointment for rural Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge, who has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arthurs: I want to thank the members from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Nickel Belt, Mississauga West and Parry Sound–Muskoka for their comments. Time not allowing, there may be an opportunity later in other comments to respond to each of those more fully.

I do want to talk just briefly about where we find ourselves fiscally. We took an approach, when coming into office and finding ourselves with a rather significant deficit, in spite of a promise of a balanced budget—we made a commitment to be prudent and responsible in our fiscal management. We didn't want to overstate the fiscal state of the province during these three or four years. When we presented the budget in 2005-06, it was showing a deficit position. By the time we got our final books together in the spring of 2006, we found the province had a modest \$263-million surplus or thereabouts. This year, we're projecting, as an interim position, a surplus of \$310 million. On a go-forward basis, we're finding that we will have a balanced position, and as we go into the final two years of the four-year go-forward position, we will have a surplus position, even if we don't need the reserves. We're on track, in effect, to have five years in sequence in which there will be a surplus position.

These surpluses aren't federal surpluses. They're not \$13 billion, but they're above the watermark. They provide confidence to the business community. They allow a little bit of room in the event that things change a bit. They allow a little bit of room for investment in other priorities as they arise. They allow a little bit of room maybe to invest more in some of the priorities that we've set out here in a given year. But the strategy and the objective is to ensure that not only do we have a balanced budget today but that we have a balanced budget on a go-forward basis, even if we need our surpluses, so that the economy stays strong and the business community has confidence in this province, something it hadn't had in some number of years before we took office.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise to debate the budget motion this evening. There are a number of facts that I'm going to set out on the table to start with and then talk about some of the challenges in the budget and how it fails to meet those significant issues in the province.

First of all, 120,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs—

Mr. Yakabuski: Gone.

Mr. Hudak: —as my colleague from Renfrew says, are gone. They have fled the province of Ontario under the Dalton McGuinty government, with no sign of them returning. In fact, there is great concern that that cycle is going to become worse.

Unbelievably, in 2006, Ontario was dead last in terms of economic growth in all of Canada—dead last. This is not the Ontario that I grew up in. It's not the Ontario the members here grew up in. It's not the Ontario that folks have immigrated to to try to find work and prosperity. It's certainly not the Ontario that my grandparents came to from then Czechoslovakia in the 1930s to find work, to raise their family, to afford a better future for their chil-

dren and grandchildren. It was then an engine of growth, as it was for most of the 20th century, until bang, Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, in 2006—dead last in economic growth. In fact, projections for 2007 by many of the banks of Ontario: once again, dead last in economic growth.

Unbelievably, in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario we're a net exporter of talent to other provinces—young, well-trained, talented individuals, entrepreneurs packing up and leaving to go to other provinces in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

1640

I'm not just talking about Alberta. We're well aware of the boom in Alberta, which by the way has been well served by some 30 consecutive years of Progressive Conservative government. It's not only the province of Alberta, but I believe—if I remember the figures—some seven other provinces and territories are taking more Ontarians than they are sending here. If it wasn't for immigration, Ontario's population would be shrinking in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. This is unprecedented. This is not the Ontario we've always known. It is not the Ontario my grandparents came to. It's not the Ontario we all grew up in or moved to. People are actually leaving our province in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. No wonder. As I said, 120,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs are now gone.

I got in the mail the other day, in one of my daily newspapers, a flyer put together by the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, I believe, calling Ontarians to visit and move to their provinces. Their job opportunities are far greater. They have examples of people from Ontario—Niagara Falls was one I remember very clearly—who said they left Ontario to find better economic opportunity out west, part of those many tens of thousands who have left the province of Ontario under Dalton McGuinty's watch in the last year alone. That's been a trend in the last couple of years under Dalton McGuinty but at odds with what our history has been in the province of Ontario.

The last number I'll throw out—we had 120,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs leave the province, and we are now a net exporter of talented Ontarians to other provinces and territories. You'll remember that \$22 billion represents the increase in government spending under Dalton McGuinty's watch. This is absolutely staggering. I think that's nearly a 34% increase in government spending—\$22 billion.

Let me put this in perspective. It took from Confederation—John Sandfield Macdonald, our first Premier—till 2003 to get government spending to \$68 billion. Today in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, \$91 billion in increased spending for the budget, and then more beyond that. It is absolutely phenomenal. It will take your breath away to imagine the staggering increase in government spending under Dalton McGuinty.

Ask the average hard-working taxpayer in the city of Toronto where we are today, in Renfrew county, Wellington county and Peterborough: Are they better off

with that \$23 billion in spending? They're going to say, resoundingly, "No." What I heard—and I think people in these ridings—

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: My Liberal colleagues are obviously upset because they heard the same thing: Hard-working, average, middle-class taxpayers, when they saw Dalton McGuinty's next big-spender budget, were outraged, because there's nothing in it for them. They work hard, play by the rules and pay their taxes fair and square. They invest in our province and they get nothing—bupkes—from Dalton McGuinty in his big-spending budget. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that we're spending some \$4,500 per household in this fantastic, incredible increase in government spending, without results.

I'm telling you that a band of pirates on shore leave would show more restraint than Dalton McGuinty in his budgets, and would probably be less destructive than Dalton McGuinty's policies have been to the economy of Ontario when you see that 120,000 manufacturing jobs have left this province.

We made some predictions—by the way, if you want to keep a close eye on how Dalton McGuinty is treating the finances, check out McGuintyWatch.ca. If you go to McGuintyWatch.ca, you'll see that the Progressive Conservative caucus estimated that Dalton McGuinty would have an end-of-year slush fund of approximately \$3 billion. By "end-of-year slush fund" I mean from the third quarter finances until the end of fiscal year, March 31. In the last two or three months of the year, he had about \$3 billion, which really means we were in a significant surplus position.

We all know that if you don't spend that money by the end of the fiscal year, March 31, 2007, it goes toward paying down the debt, which would have been nice, because we've seen the debt increase substantially under Dalton McGuinty's watch. But instead of managing finances prudently, instead of putting that money down toward the debt, he went once more on a last-minute spending spree extraordinaire.

We had predicted \$3 billion, which was made up of two contingency funds: one under the Ministry of Finance and one under public infrastructure renewal. It's a fancy name for slush funds. They had set those aside. They had about a \$1-billion reserve. These guys are about as accurate with their budget forecast as they are with keeping their campaign platform. They had, we estimated, an additional \$400 million in revenue, about \$400 million from overestimating their interest costs. It's a game they play every year and I think my colleague from Ottawa Centre knows that, that they exaggerate their interest costs to try to inflate their expenditures.

That sounds like a phenomenal number: \$3 billion in an end-of-year slush fund. Do you know what it turned out to be at the end of the year? It's \$4.6 billion in an end-of-year slush fund. They had \$2.1 billion more in revenue than they claimed they had coming in as recently as the third quarter financial statements, which came out and were published in January. So I guess we're led to

believe that in the last three months of the year, suddenly \$2.1 billion appeared magically out of the air.

Mr. Yakabuski: Maybe they won the lottery. Everybody else seems to have won.

Mr. Hudak: Maybe those lotteries that weren't being won were actually going into the finance minister's vault there at the Frost.

So \$2.1 billion in higher revenues than they said that they had in the third quarter finances: In reality, I think they were cooking the books. It was probably very difficult to even see things over there at the Frost centre because of all the smoke floating around as the books were being fried up on the propane barbecue. Some \$2.1 billion in higher revenues, \$360 million in lower debt costs, the \$1.2 billion in contingency funds we mentioned, and a \$1-billion reserve: \$4.6 billion. Picture this: one big sack of money with one giant "S" on it and Dalton McGuinty's lying—laughing face on the other side. I almost had a Freudian slip there, Mr. Speaker. I meant to say "laughing face" as opposed to the other L word.

They say, "Well, what about the health tax?" That's almost twice the amount of the health tax. The health tax brought in about \$2.6 billion. They had \$4.1 billion more in revenue than they said that they needed, so far more than the so-called health tax, which we all know doesn't even flow to health care; it just goes to the consolidated revenue fund.

Again, instead of investing those funds in balancing the books, lowering the debt and reducing taxes for hard-working taxpayers in the province of Ontario, they went on a last-minute, end-of-year spending spree, which has been criticized by the Auditor General, I think, each and every year of the McGuinty budgets. Because when you do these end-of-year spending initiatives, there are no strings attached. You may say, "Oh, it's for roads." You may say that it's for a research centre for Magna or something like that—which was, incidentally, left out of the budget papers. You may claim that, but the reality is that there are no strings attached whatsoever. So they could basically spend it on whatever they determined was appropriate to the transfer partners. The Auditor General has repeatedly and strongly criticized the McGuinty government for this approach.

Some \$22 billion in new revenues: Let me also point out that from the time the 2006-07 budget was announced—about this time last year—and the time the interim actuals came in as part of the 2007-08 budget, do you know what revenues were on a comparative basis? They actually ended up, at the end of the day, with about \$4 billion more in revenues and reduced interest costs than they said that they were going to get at the beginning of the year—so \$4 billion in additional funds coming in.

Mr. Yakabuski: How can they be off so much?

Mr. Hudak: Well, they were off—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I think my colleague is right, probably on both accounts. But with the \$4 billion in additional

revenue that's come in, how can they make the case that they need the so-called health tax—which is just an income tax increase; in fact, a very regressive income tax increase—when \$4 billion in additional revenue room came in this year. Last year was similar, by the way, where the additional revenue that came in over the budget projections exceeded the value of the health tax.

1650

I imagine there have been some changes in the Minister of Finance's office. Maybe he has given this particular staff member to the new Minister of Revenue. I welcome the new Minister of Revenue, in the first Ministry of Revenue we've had since Bob Rae got rid of it in 1993 as a redundant ministry.

Mr. Leal: He's a great minister, a great guy.

Mr. Hudak: He's the best Minister of Revenue we've had in 14, 15 years. I'm not sure about the one in 1993, actually.

There have got to be changes in the Minister of Finance's office. I'll tell you why. It's typical for the Minister of Finance to do some sort of pre-budget dog and pony show to try to get some publicity on what the budget is about. Last year, remember, the then-finance minister, Dwight Duncan, went to an animation studio and had a cartoon drawn up about how he single-handedly has turned everything around in the province of Ontario. It featured Dwight, actually, not the Premier or cabinet or his colleagues. It featured the minister himself—I thought that was interesting; nobody else—lugging this huge burden on his shoulders. But that's a side point.

So this year Minister Sorbara went to a facility to help out women who face various challenges, particularly, I think, on the financial side, moving up the ladder. So it's a suitable photo op for some of the themes in the budget, although I'll argue that they fall well short of promises. But strangely the minister, you might remember, started reading *The Little Engine That Could*. So I guess he was in this photo op demonstrating that Ontario was the little engine that could, that thinks it can, thinks it can, and we're all full of hope that this little engine can probably do something. My God, we used to be the big engine that did. We used to be the big engine that pulled the rest of the provinces behind us, the first one out of recession, and pulled screaming and kicking into recession. Ontario has always been the big engine that could. He sees us—Dalton McGuinty sees us—as a little engine.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: "Small wonder," my colleague from London says. "Come on; small wonder." I think she listened to the first part of my remarks: last in growth in all of Canada. We're losing 120,000 well-paying jobs, with very few projections for a turnaround in the future.

I've got to think that the staff member in the Minister of Finance's office who chose that particular book and that analogy has been shuffled out of that position, because it was just a strange analogy to bring forward but—do you know what?—apropos, I guess, to what Dalton McGuinty's government has done to Ontario's formerly booming economy.

I'll talk about it. I have only about five minutes left so I'll get into a few other remarks and hopefully have a chance to speak a bit more later on during debate.

Of course, we always want to bring up some issues that are important to us in our local ridings. I know that the city of Hamilton, for example, and Niagara region were very disappointed in many respects about omissions from the budget.

Hamilton: I think we had some discussion in the Legislature about how they were ripped off, scammed by the McGuinty government, by the lack of funds that flow to the city of Hamilton, expecting significantly more. We'll see, I guess, with some of these seats in jeopardy in the Hamilton area under this government, if they back-pedal and kick in some more funds, but I know that in the city of Hamilton, councillors from all parts of the city were highly critical of the cuts in funding from the province in this budget to that area.

The Niagara region: Sadly, we have seen the mid-peninsula corridor which, when constructed, will be a major artery for investment in trade and tourism in southern and western Niagara, and parts of the Hamilton area as well, has been thrown into reverse by the Dalton McGuinty government. Honest to goodness, it's going to be like we'll be the Jetsons some day, flying over where the highway could have been by the time things get happening under the McGuinty government's slow pace. The mid-peninsula corridor, as you'll see in the budget, has been relegated to a vaguely defined term: "future projects"—no dates for completion, no dates for completion of the environmental assessment, no funding attached whatsoever, so this government will have gone through an entire mandate and advanced that project not a single centimetre. In fact, I'd argue it's taking it backwards in wasting hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of taxpayer dollars that have gone into previous studies and previous work on that.

I say to my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources that it would have been nice to see, and maybe he will find it in his budget, although the natural resources budget was unfortunately—

Mr. Yakabuski: Cut \$36 million.

Mr. Hudak:—cut \$36 million, my colleague says. So it's going to be more difficult for him, and I'll encourage him to do so, to help the township of West Lincoln with their gypsy moth eradication program. I've written to the minister. I know it's going to be even more difficult, now that Dalton McGuinty has cut the funding to the ministry, but I will call upon him again to assist because it's a small amount of money in the grand scheme of things.

The agriculture budget, as my colleague for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke had indicated earlier, was cut—

Mr. Yakabuski: Slashed.

Mr. Hudak:—under the Dalton McGuinty government. You could call it slashed. I know when I was in my riding this past weekend and Friday, that was one of the lowlights of the budget that people in my riding of Erie-Lincoln mentioned to me—

Mr. Yakabuski: What have they got against farmers?

Mr. Hudak:—asking what they have against farmers, as my colleague says. I do understand it strategically. Dalton McGuinty has written off rural Ontario. He has circled some of the members' seats, some of whom are in the House tonight, and said he can win the next election without catering to those seats. I understand that's his strategy. I think it's unfortunate, and certainly farmers in my riding of Erie-Lincoln have caught that and are very upset with the backhand they have received from Dalton McGuinty.

One of the projects we had hoped would see some advancement in this budget was a replant program which would have helped the grape growers, tender fruit growers and apple growers in this province. We certainly had heard or were given indications that this was happening, and once again Dalton McGuinty has run against expectations. He has led people to believe one thing and delivered the opposite. So it's unfortunate that the replant program did not find purchase in this budget. But you know what? Not surprisingly, because as I said, it looks like Dalton McGuinty has written off rural Ontario for funding when it comes to the next election.

I'll return to this topic later on, but the Dalton McGuinty plan for property assessment is a strange mix of smoke and mirrors and exaggerations. Basically, instead of people being gouged year in and year out by skyrocketing property assessments, Dalton McGuinty is going to gouge them for four years running.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I know my colleague from Peterborough voted for the Homestead Act, which he knows would cap assessment increases at 5% a year. Dalton McGuinty's policy will do no such thing, and certainly if we see the types of trends continue in Peterborough, Essex, Niagara and Hamilton that we have seen the last number of years, people will still be facing double-digit assessment increases under Dalton McGuinty's plan.

I know my colleague for Parry Sound-Muskoka has sent me a number of letters from residents in his riding who have seen assessment increases of over 100% in two years. If you average that in, that is 50% a year, and a far cry from the 5% cap that John Tory and the Ontario PCs will bring in for real protection for Ontario homeowners.

I hope my colleague at this point in time. I hope my colleagues from the government side will be able to give me some assurance that the 120,000 lost manufacturing jobs, the Ontarians fleeing to other provinces and the runaway spending without results will reverse, but after four years it's time for a change.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: I appreciate the comments made by the member for Erie-Lincoln. I specifically want to focus on the comments he made with respect to the loss of good manufacturing jobs in the province of Ontario, and I know he would want me to put on the record here this afternoon just a snapshot of what that loss has been like in my part of the world in northern Ontario. So let me just give you some idea about some of the communities in northern Ontario where forestry jobs have been lost:

Chapleau, 100 jobs lost; Smooth Rock Falls, 400, in tire mills shut down; Dryden, 525 jobs lost between the paper mill and the saw mill; Kenora, 400 jobs lost; Thunder Bay—well, Thunder Bay has taken it right in the back of the head—over 1,200 jobs lost among a number of plants to date and still counting; Longlac, 300 jobs lost; Ignace, 75 jobs lost; Opasatika, 100 jobs lost; Timmins, 150 jobs lost; the entire Woodlands operation at the Nairn Centre sawmill; and the Nairn Centre sawmill also down 150 jobs; the Espanola pulp and paper mill, 150 jobs. Now you've got St. Mary's Paper and Sault Ste. Marie on the verge of collapse, and who knows how many hundreds of workers will lose their jobs there.

That's just a snapshot of what's happening across northern Ontario because this government refuses to do anything about its job-killing, high hydro rates. I would have thought that this close to an election, the government in northern Ontario would have recognized that what it needed to do was to put in a regional pricing plan so that where there is power generation beside those sawmills where power is produced at one and two cents a kilowatt hour, they could actually pay one and two cents per kilowatt hour instead of seven. The government didn't do that; there are thousands more jobs that are going to be lost.

1700

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): When we get lessons in economics from the Tories, I find it humorous. I have a research paper on the province of Ontario, key financial statistics. It goes from 1996 through 2006.

From 1976 to 1985, the good old Bill Davis years, the government ran a deficit every year that ran from \$1.1 billion to \$3.2 billion. The NDP, we know, in their five years, when economic times were rough, ran up the debt with deficits every year to the tune of \$47 billion. But now here come the Tories, the Mike Harris Tories. Can you remember when he borrowed \$20 billion to give us a tax cut? I remember that. And you know what? From 1995, the first year, to 2003, good old Mikey Harris ran up the debt \$37 billion: a deficit every year from 1995 to 2003.

Now, I will give him credit—

Interjections.

Mr. Hudak: It's not true.

Mr. Crozier: Legislative research; I'll give you a copy.

I will give him credit: There were three years when there was not a deficit—amounted to \$3 billion. So net deficit under the Tories: \$34 billion. And they're giving us their advice? I think they should give themselves a break, and I would keep quiet about what they did.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): The member for Erie-Lincoln does a good job as our finance critic, he does a good job at crunching the numbers, and I think he'd do an excellent job as a finance minister in the near future.

The member for Erie-Lincoln made mention of the mid-Pen corridor, as he is wont to do, and I've had the chance to work with Tim Hudak on the mid-Pen corridor.

Both of us know the benefits it would have for a community like Dunnville, for example, that by some measure has a modicum of isolation where it is located. The northern part of Haldimand county and Brant county would benefit from a corridor that would take the pressure off the Niagara Escarpment.

The member from Erie-Lincoln would know that this budget had no money for our tobacco farmers.

There was no additional compensation for homeowners who are affected by the Caledonia situation.

He mentioned the gypsy moth, and I think most people in northern and rural Ontario realize the disastrous funding of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

He mentioned cuts to agriculture. This budget is \$191 million less than it was last year.

The financial shortfall with respect to the Ontario municipal partnership fund: This is a problem in Norfolk county. They are concerned about funding policing and social services, and very concerned about the lack of money for sewage capacity down in the Port Rowan area.

Haldimand county had their railway bridge burn down about a year ago. Funding for that Sterling Street bridge was announced last summer, and then the same money was reannounced again, and again the question is, do we want to build a bridge to nowhere?

There is an awful lot of confusion with respect to the funding decisions coming out of this particular government.

Mr. Leal: It's a pleasure to make comments on the speech that was just delivered by my good friend from Erie-Lincoln.

But I'd like to make reference to table 25, page 166 in the budget. When it comes to the operating budget for agriculture, food and rural affairs, it has grown from some \$843 million in 2003-04 to \$876 million, the plan for 2007-08. Now, I come from the south end of Peterborough. I went to school at St. John the Baptist and Kenner Collegiate, and with the great training I got from those teachers, it would suggest to me that any budget that goes from \$843 million to \$876 million is an increase in the operational budget.

Further to that, under contingency operations for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, we have provided \$1 billion over the last four years to meet the crisis that was experienced by Ontario's agricultural community. We were there when the farmers of Ontario needed help.

Let me tell you, a good friend of the member from Erie-Lincoln, Jim Flaherty—I know they always go to the Albany Club for lunch every other week. Here's what Jim Flaherty said in June in the *Globe and Mail*: He said that for those people in Ontario that are losing their jobs in manufacturing, they are able to find "other comparable, well-paying employment if they lose their job in the manufacturing sector." That's from Jim Flaherty, a good friend of the member from Erie-Lincoln. I know they play golf together at the Rosedale golf and country club and have lunch every other day at the Albany Club. So Jim, if you're watching tonight, give the facts to your

friend from Erie–Lincoln so he understands finances in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time available for questions and comments. I'll return to the member for Erie–Lincoln for his reply.

Mr. Hudak: I think my friend from Peterborough protests a little too much. I think he has seen a shadow over his shoulder in our nominated candidate, Mr. Fitzpatrick, because I've not seen the member from Peterborough go to that extent before.

I say to him, he didn't give all of the facts when he referred to page 166, table 25, because further down, as my colleague from Haldimand had noted, you'll see the other agricultural expenses. In 2006-07—interim and actuals—the spending was \$1,087,000,000, so almost \$1.1 billion. The spending projected for 2007-08? Some \$896 million, a significant cut in the Ministry of Agriculture. I had hoped that the member from Peterborough would have looked down a bit further.

I'll put on the floor now a couple of things I didn't get to in my remarks to see if my colleagues want to respond to them. I was absolutely shocked when Dalton McGuinty brought in yet another tax, this time to hammer a new project, the De Beers diamond mine just outside of Attawapiskat, which I hope will employ a lot of aboriginals in the area and bring some economic benefits to that area. Then, under the cover of darkness, without even discussing it with the proponents or the locals, he hammers them with a new tax, an extraordinary new tax on royalties in the diamond sector. We saw those comments in the business section recently. So Dalton McGuinty just can't help himself. Even in his last budget, he's sneaking his hand into the pockets of working families and seniors in the province of Ontario.

Their recent conversion on the minimum wage increase was a bit laughable too. The NDP, to their credit, have been consistent on this. I don't agree with the increase that they advocate, but they've been consistent. Dalton McGuinty comes up and says, "Well, we're going to up the ante to 25 cents," even after he was arguing. That is simply not believable.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Martel: It's a pleasure for me to participate in this debate. I want to begin by saying that last week there were two Conservative budgets delivered: one in Ottawa and one here in Ontario. I emphasize Conservative budgets, because it's really clear that in both cases, neither government acknowledged or did anything to address the growing income gap that we are experiencing both across Canada and here in Ontario. There have been in the last couple of months at least three reports that have been done to show how that gap is growing. I want to reference some of that today in the remarks that I'm going to make.

1710

First of all, from Stats-Can, their recent report said the following:

"The wealth gap between Canada's richest families and everybody else widened between 1984, 1990 and

2005. When all families are considered medium wealth, the wealthiest 20% of families amounted to about 551,000 in 2005 compared with 465,000 in 1999 and 336,000 in 1984. In contrast, medium wealth in the bottom 20% of the distribution has stagnated over the past two decades. It was essentially zero in 1984, negative about 1,000 in both 1999 and 2005. Between 1984 and 2005, families in the top 10% increased their share of total wealth. The top 10% of Canadian families held 58% of household wealth in 2005. That's up from 56% in 1999 and 52% in 1984. The top 20% of Canadian families held 75% of total household wealth in 2005. That's up from 73% in 1999 and 69% in 1984. Compare that to families in the middle 20% who saw their wealth share tumble from 9.1% in 1984 to 7.7% in 1999 and to 6.9% in 2005." It's clear the gap is growing, and it's much worse for those at the bottom level.

Here's some information from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives which also shows how big the gap is growing. "By noon on New Year's Day, as many Canadians recovered from New Year's Eve, the average top 100 Canadian CEOs had pocketed as much as a minimum wage worker will earn all year. By 9:46 a.m. on January 2, that same CEO had exceeded the average Canadian's annual earnings for all of 2007. By 6 p.m. that evening, January 2, the average CEO had earned \$70,000." My, oh my, what people trying to live on the minimum wage in Ontario must think of that.

Let me deal with the third report that's been released recently, this from the Toronto Campaign 2000 report card on child poverty, focusing specifically on child poverty in Toronto:

"One in three children in Toronto still lives in poverty. The incidence of child poverty (33.5%) is higher than in 1995. The number of poor children (174,050) has increased by 21,800 since 1995.

"The poor got poorer. The medium income of poor lone-parent families fell in real dollars from \$14,670 in 1995 to \$13,100 by 2000 in Toronto. For poor two-parent families it fell from \$16,540 to \$14,040."

What's interesting is that at the same time "economic growth has been strong. By the year 2000 employment income in Toronto ... is up by 16.4% since 1990, and by 27% since 1995.

"The Toronto CMA has the largest gap in Canada between those at the top and" those at "the bottom of the income ladder. The top 10% of families have average incomes that are 27 times greater than the lowest 10%."

I could go on, because Campaign 2000 gives a number of other very important statistics, but I think the point has been made. In the face of growing inequality, in the face of a growing gap between the richest and the poorest in this province and in this country, we see no measures, either from the federal government or from the provincial government, to do anything concrete to reduce that gap in the near future.

There are a number of things the government could do. These were put forward by Campaign 2000. I want to

focus on them because they could have made their way in a significant way into the budget and they did not.

Number one, Campaign 2000 says this government could finally end the clawback of the national child benefit. Of course, it was only in 2003, before the last election, that Mr. McGuinty made this promise in an election questionnaire to Campaign Against Child Poverty that said, "Will your party make it a priority to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement from families on social assistance?" And Dalton McGuinty said, "We will end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement. The clawback is wrong and we will end it. The Harris-Eves government has reinforced the cycle of poverty, not broken it." All this government has done is given the inflationary increase for the clawback back to those families. They haven't fully ended the clawback. Every single year, this government continues to steal back \$225 million from the poorest families in this province. It's not even your money; this is federal money targeted for the poorest families, not just in Ontario but right across the country. And your government, despite the promise made by your Premier four years ago, still continues to claw it back. How shameful. How utterly shameful.

What was even worse was that when you looked in the budget to see what this government had to say this time about the clawback, it is clear that the clawback will not end for another five years. It will take another five years for this government to stop stealing from the poorest families in Ontario. What is wrong with this picture? What is wrong with this government that it would take this money from the poorest families in Ontario? And you talk about a commitment to poverty when that's what you do to the poorest families, when these families are going to have to wait another five years before the clawback will finally end.

I've said it before and I'll say it again in this debate: A child who was born in the same year that Dalton McGuinty made this promise in 2003 is going to be six years old before they see a benefit from the national child benefit. That same child, if they were 10 years old when the promise was made, will never see any benefit from it. And this isn't provincial money; it's federal money that's supposed to go to the poorest Ontarians, and instead this government just steals it back year after year after year from the poorest families.

I wonder what the government is going to say this time when the election questionnaire comes from Campaign Against Child Poverty, when they ask this time, "Is the government going to end the clawback of the national child benefit?" I wonder what McGuinty is going to say this time. "Oh, yes, it's so unfair and it's so unfortunate. It increases poverty, and maybe we'll end it in another five years because we didn't keep our promise the last time." That's what the budget proposes, that the clawback will not end for another five years. That is unacceptable, especially when the Minister of Finance tried to get up and claim that this would be a budget that will deal with poverty in Ontario.

What else could the government be doing? Well, of course, the government could be providing good-quality child care. That's another recommendation that Campaign 2000 made when they released their report. And what do we see in the last election? What did Dalton McGuinty promise in the last election? Well, here is the same election questionnaire from Campaign Against Child Poverty. The question was this: "How will your party increase access to high-quality, licensed child care services?" And Dalton McGuinty responded, "The Harris-Eves government has not put a penny into licensed child care. We are proposing an infusion of \$300 million." You know what? The McGuinty Liberal government has not put a penny of its own money into child care since 2003—not \$100 million, not \$200 million, not \$300 million; not a single penny of provincial money has been put into child care in the province of Ontario. The only money that has been spent on child care has been federal money flowed through to the province. So never mind Harris-Eves; what about the McGuinty Liberals and their promise in 2003?

Do you know what's also interesting? Right now, the province is sitting on about \$138.5 million of unspent federal money for child care. And how much does this government propose to spend on quality child care in this budget? Twenty-five million. They're sitting on \$138.5 million and they're only going to spend \$25 million this year. Where is the rest of the money going? Do you honestly think there are families out there who don't need high-quality child care? Of course there are. Toronto itself has probably got a list for subsidized child care of about 15,000, and many other communities have hundreds and hundreds of kids on a waiting list, needing subsidized, high-quality child care. This government, sitting on \$138.5 million of federal money for child care, is only going to spend \$25 million this year.

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I wonder what Premier McGuinty is going to say to Campaign Against Child Poverty in the questionnaire that's going to come out this year, 2007, about the McGuinty government's commitment to increasing access to high-quality child care. Maybe they should ask the McGuinty government, after the last election promise that was broken, if maybe this time around they are actually going to spend provincial money that they promised to spend.

What else could the government do? Of course, according to Campaign 2000, the government could increase social assistance rates in the province so as to actually provide a living income in the province of Ontario. The reality is that, as a result of a 22% cut in social assistance by the Conservatives and the freeze, those on social assistance now are about 38% behind the eight ball. That's how much they've lost because the cost of living has certainly gone up, the cost of rent, the cost of food, the cost of hydro and the cost of clothes for the kids. You name it; that's all gone up. But their rates haven't increased anywhere near that to make up for the gap. In fact, this government promised they were going

to increase social assistance rates by the cost of living every year that they were in government, and this government has failed to do that. They have not increased social assistance rates by the cost of living every year.

The reality is that, today, families trying to live on OW are worse off financially under the McGuinty Liberals than they were under the Harris Conservatives. What do we see in the budget with respect to some of the poorest families in the province? A 2% increase—and, by the way, we're still going to claw back the national child benefit from those same families. The 2% increase is certainly not going to get those families very far, is certainly not going to close the gap they've experienced over the last 10 years and is certainly not going to bring them out of poverty.

What else could the government do? Campaign 2000 recommended, "Build new, affordable housing." After all, in the last election, Premier McGuinty promised 20,000 new, affordable housing units. The Liberals, if elected, were going to build 20,000 new, affordable housing units. Do you know how many have been built? A little over 2,000. We've got six months to go before the next campaign, and the best this government has done is to build a little over 2,000 affordable housing units. Do they not have the money to do it? Hardly, because they received \$392 million from the federal government, and that's been sitting on ice for a long, long time as the government was trying to negotiate for some more money. They got \$392 million from Paul Martin and it still hasn't gotten out the door, still hasn't been spent. What does the government say in this budget about how much of that money it's going to spend? It's only going to spend \$127 million out of that \$392 million of federal money you've been sitting on.

Don't you think there's a need for affordable housing out there? There sure is, in this city and every other. Don't you think that building affordable housing would do something to alleviate the income gap between those at the top and those at the bottom? It sure would. Don't you think spending some of that money might actually allow you to keep your election promise? That would too, but it seems you're not too interested in doing that. You're never going to close the gap between the 2,000-plus affordable housing units that have been built and the 20,000 that you promised. The shame of it is that the government had the money to do it, has been sitting on the money to do it and will not get those units out the door in the face of desperate need for affordable housing in this city and so many others.

What else did Campaign 2000 say? It said that the government could raise the minimum wage now, because right now it is a fact that people who are working long and hard, working 40 hours a week, to make ends meet for their families are still living below the poverty level in the province of Ontario. No reasonable person should accept that. Who are some of these workers? Two hundred thousand, mainly immigrants and women, make up those who are on minimum wage now: 61% are adults; 64% are women; 48% have some post-secondary edu-

cation. Despite all that, despite working 40 hours a week on minimum wage, they are using food banks and clothing banks and they are barely making the rent from one month to the next. There are 1.2 million Ontarians who are making less than \$10 an hour right now. I don't know how they are doing it, I don't know how they are making ends meet, and the government comes forward with a proposal not to raise the minimum wage now to \$10 an hour to get those families out of poverty, as we should be doing now. No, we're going to tell them that they can live in poverty for another three years, and in 2010 they'll get an increase to \$10.25. But by that time, as costs rise, as rents rise, as the cost of food rises, as the cost of clothes rises and the cost of natural gas rises, they are still going to be living in poverty, at \$10.25 an hour three years from now. Those families, working longer and harder than ever, deserve decent pay for the work they are doing, and they deserve it now. No family in Ontario working long, working hard, working 40 hours a week should still be living in poverty at the end of the day, and that is the reality we are facing in this province.

Did the government respond to that critical issue of so many people living in poverty while working full-time? No, they did not. This government condemned those same families to continue to live in poverty for another three years, and probably longer after that, and that is shameful. This was a key election issue in York South-Weston, one of the poorest ridings in this province, and it's going to be a key election issue in October 2007, because reasonable people—and there are lots of them out there—know that a family that is working 40 hours a week on minimum wage should not have to continue to live in poverty—not now and not three years from now. We need an increase in the minimum wage to \$10 an hour and we need it now.

I contrast all of what could have been done by this government in this budget and all that wasn't done with the one change that the finance minister made with respect to the capital tax. This finance minister proudly got up in his place and said, "We're going to accelerate again, for the second time, the elimination of the capital tax. By this time in 2010 it will be eliminated." My goodness, don't the banks and the financial institutions need that? Haven't they made enough profit in Ontario and across Canada? That was what the finance minister was going to accelerate—not accelerate a \$10 minimum wage now, not accelerate provincial money for new child care, not accelerate getting the money out the door for affordable housing, not increase social assistance rates to a living wage, not accelerating the clawback by actually ending it now instead of five years from now. No, no, the finance minister, who wanted to make this a poverty budget, couldn't do any of that for some of the lowest-income families in the province. He could help out the banks and the financial institutions but he had nothing to say and nothing concrete to offer to those poorest families in the province.

Do you know what's interesting? The benefit that this government is going to bring forward is actually going to

be less for families, in terms of income going into their pockets, than it would be if the government just ended the clawback now. If the government ended the clawback now, they would get \$1,500 a month in their pocket, and they're going to get \$1,100 a month in their pocket five years from now. That is a crying shame in a province that is doing as well as we are, at a time when we should have been using this budget to really end that gap between the richest and the poorest.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

1730

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): It's a pleasure for me to speak in favour of the budget. Let me tell you that my riding of Thornhill and the regions of York, Peel and Halton in particular are very happy because this government will finally remove the social transfer from those regions to Toronto, a transfer of \$200 million a year that the Conservatives imposed on those three regions. It was a travesty when that happened. The region of York alone transferred \$740 million over that time, and of course those were monies that local taxpayers paid to support the social assistance that belonged to the province. So we are very happy with that change. That change was asked for by the three regions—by the chairs, by the local council, by the regional council—and the Liberals delivered.

In addition to that, we certainly have made a major improvement to the lives of workers in Ontario. The NDP left the minimum wage at \$6.85. The PCs for nine years did nothing. We increased the minimum wage over four years from \$6.85 to \$8, and now with this budget we are going to move it up to \$10.25—more than what the NDP has been talking about after our position taken. So we have done much for working people in Ontario. In addition to that, we have also increased the annual increase to injured workers by 2.5% every year for the next three years.

Major achievements for working people; major achievements for the 905 people.

Of course, the other important factor in the budget is that the assessment on property will be done over four years instead of an annual increase in value.

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): First, I want to commend the member from Nickel Belt on her well-prepared summation of the budget today. She's right on in pretty nearly everything. There might be the odd thing I might disagree with but, boy, she knows her stuff, and if the Liberals would only even listen to half of what she says, they might get a half-decent budget. But, of course, we know they're not going to listen, we know that they really don't care, and they still want to blame the other governments. They haven't figured out after four years that they're the government. I can't believe you guys. How slow are you over there, when you've been around for four years? This is your budget. Wear it, folks. You should be proud of it, but every time you get up, you've got to blame either the NDP or the Conservatives: "Oh, it's their fault." You guys have been around for four years, and it's shameful

you'd come in like this and spend \$20 billion more than when you came in and you still haven't solved a lot of the problems.

Look at our homes for the aged. You give them one minute when they require 30 more minutes. That's shameful. That is so shameful for our most vulnerable people who live in homes for aged, that you people would just forget about them, just forget about them totally in this budget. That is so shameful.

I know you have some new members over there, and they must be wondering, "What is going on with this government? Why would I ever run for the Liberals? They don't care. And when they get cornered, oh, it's the other fellow's fault; it's the other people's fault. It's not our fault. We have no responsibility. We just sit here day after day and do what we're told and do nothing about what's going on in this province."

Rural Ontario again was left out. I heard one of the members go on, but that's unfortunate. He likes to twist the numbers around. Actually, over \$100 million was taken out of the budget. It's unfortunate he can't count, but that's the way it goes with the Liberals. And then you'll probably blame us for it. It will be our fault, the more than \$100 million.

And you've spent over \$20 billion more. Shame. Shame on you people.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I wanted to have the chance to comment on the member from Nickel Belt when she was talking about the budget. I guess the member shouldn't talk about the budget as a whole, as a strategy to transform the social structure in the province of Ontario.

It's a very important budget to tackle all the issues. I know the need is great to increase the minimum wage to probably \$20. We have to build 100,000 units. Many different requests come to us as a government, but we have to manage the budget very well. We have to tackle all the issues, from health care to education to infrastructure. Also, at the same time, we have to look after the working poor among us.

She was talking about the clawback, and it's a very important question. The clawback was done by Mr. Harris back then, not to go to the government coffers, to reinvest in different programs. What's easy for us: if we went and cancelled and finished the clawback, which we did. But we want a very important strategy to tackle poverty as a whole by creating a different strategy to work and to support the hard-working poor, who are working on a daily basis: supporting them with \$100 for housing, \$250 for every child this year, and next year \$600, and the year after it will be \$1,100. People making between \$20,000 and \$30,000 will still benefit from this strategy because we believe it's very important that the hard-working poor among us should walk with us. We should give them a lift, and that's our responsibility as a government. We have to elevate people to be able to produce, to feel they are a part of this great province. That's why we're working. It's very simple to go for \$250, cancel the clawback, but our investment was

greater than this: \$2.1 billion. This is not an issue about the money. It's an issue about putting a strategy to include all the people of Ontario. Working poor, people on social assistance, everyone should be entitled to support and help.

Mr. Miller: It was a pleasure to listen to the member from Nickel Belt for the last 20 minutes, and certainly it's very clear that the NDP has been pushing for a higher minimum wage, a \$10 minimum wage. The government, on the other hand, in this recent budget has suddenly become a convert to this idea. I think probably the politics of it is that, you know, we've had some recent by-elections happen where the NDP have won some seats, and now all of a sudden the government not only is a convert but is going 25 cents better than the NDP in raising the minimum wage to \$10.25, although of course it's going to be after the next election, so who really knows what will be happening with that?

But I would like to ask what happened to that promise of \$6,000 per long-term-care resident. It was a very clear promise made in the last election. I mean, you're spending \$22 billion a year more than you were when you came into power in 2003, and yet you haven't kept the promise to fund long-term-care residents to \$6,000 per resident. That was your promise and that is one you haven't kept. In fact, in this budget, what do we hear? There was 50 cents per resident of long-term-care homes in this budget—50 cents. That buys exactly one minute of extra care for residents of long-term care.

So my question is, what are Ontario residents getting for this \$22 billion in extra money that is being spent when this very clear promise was not kept, and many others? I note that the Ministry of Natural Resources seems very much to be struggling, as are tourism and agriculture and other priority areas for rural Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time for questions and comments. The member for Nickel Belt has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Martel: I want to thank the members from Thornhill, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, London-Fanshawe and Parry Sound-Muskoka for their contributions and say this: I focused on those measures that I think could have alleviated poverty and that weren't in the budget. After all, it was the Minister of Finance who several weeks ago said that this budget was going to focus on poverty and was going to deal with those who were living in poverty.

Well, I named five measures that could have been taken and that should have been taken in this budget if the Minister of Finance and the Dalton McGuinty government were actually serious about what they said. I can only assume that they weren't, because the fact of the matter is, and I say this to the member from London-Fanshawe, you haven't ended the clawback. You will not end the clawback for another five years, and that is absolutely shameful. You haven't done anything to deal with those people on social assistance who are under greater financial risk now than they were under the Harris Conservatives.

With respect to new affordable housing, you are so far short of what you promised in what you have built that

you will never make up that gap in the next six months, even though you had federal money for months and months and months that would have allowed you to do that.

With respect to child care, you've broken the promise that you made in the last election to spend 300 million new dollars on child care. Not only that, but this government's got about \$138 million from the feds that they are still sitting on for child care and this year are only going to spend \$25 million, at a time when there is a desperate need for high-quality, non-profit child care in this province.

And finally, with respect to the minimum wage, I'll say it again: I think it's a disgrace that in Ontario today people can work 40 hours a week and still live below the poverty level, and the measures announced by the government will mean they will still live in poverty for the next three years and beyond.

1740

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Leal: It is a pleasure for me today to make some comment on budget 2007 that was delivered to this House on March 22.

I had the opportunity this morning to be with the Premier in the riding of Peterborough to talk about an investment we're going to make of some \$1.3 million in the Five Counties Children's Centre. Let me talk about the Five Counties Children's Centre. It's part of a network of 21 child treatment centres in the province of Ontario. I take great pride. The Minister of Children and Youth Services in the province of Ontario has, on at least two occasions, had the opportunity to visit the Five Counties Children's Centre in Peterborough to see the outstanding work led by CEO Diane Pick and her very professional and competent staff, who treat children with a wide variety of difficulties. Whether it's speech therapy or physiotherapy, they have a record second to none of helping kids out. That investment—for the longest time, they've had portables that are at the back of the existing facility. They've had a capital plan for at least a decade. Previous governments looked at that investment and decided, no, they weren't going to do it. This morning, this government stepped forward with an infusion of \$1.3 million for them to address their capital plan to get rid of those portables that are at the back of the facility today, have a construction project, extend that facility and integrate those services that are currently in the portables to have them part of the main structure of Peterborough to provide that fine professional service they deliver to so many kids in the five counties region and, with the help of the Minister of Children and Youth Services, to reduce those waiting lists that were sitting around for eight long years, that were never addressed. This minister came to Peterborough on two occasions to make sure that those waiting lists have been reduced significantly. The investment this morning will go a long way for the capital project so they can continue in the fine tradition of the five counties to deliver that service.

My good friends from the NDP talk about poverty. You know, it's interesting—I was a city councillor in

1993 in Peterborough and I remember the day that they announced they were going to freeze ODSP rates, which they did in 1993. When you couple their freeze in 1993 with the eight long Tory years where there was no increase—in fact, ODSP rates were reduced—that was the foundation, the start of having the poverty crisis in the province of Ontario. Then, during their watch, they also took away the grants for low-income families in the province of Ontario. That's their record and they've never apologized for doing that to the low-income people in the province of Ontario.

So what has this budget started? It has started the Ontario child benefit, which gets rid of the clawback in the province of Ontario, something that has been recognized by none other than Charles Pascal. I know Charles reasonably well—a former president of Fleming College in Peterborough. Today, he is the executive director of the Atkinson Foundation, which is the charitable arm of the Toronto Star group, and has been active very active on the poverty front. In fact, I also want to point out this about Charles Pascal: He was the Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services during the NDP government. Yesterday, in the Toronto Star he had an opinion piece which he wrote, to talk about the benefits of the Ontario child benefit. He talked about this as being an amazing step forward in reducing in reducing child poverty in the province of Ontario as we move from \$250 dollars per child this July to, when it's fully implemented, \$1,100 per child in 2011. He talked about this as being one of the most significant social policy initiatives in the history of the province of Ontario. In fact, this initiative has been endorsed by three former Premiers: William Davis, Bob Rae and David Peterson. Those are three individuals who were Premiers in the province of Ontario. They have looked at this child benefit and they decided this is one of the most positive things to occur in Ontario, and I concur with their observations.

The member from Nickel Belt referenced Campaign 2000. I'm going to quote from Jacquie Maund, who is the Ontario coordinator of Campaign 2000. This is what she said about the Ontario budget that was released on March 22. "There are a number of steps forward taken in this budget that are key areas that we've been calling for: improved child benefit, increased minimum wage and investments in affordable housing and child care." I think it's time that the NDP looked at their briefing notes when they make comments from individuals who are involved with the Ontario coordinator of Campaign 2000.

Michael Mendelson, a senior scholar for the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, a think tank in Ontario which has a very distinguished reputation, quoting on some of the measures in the budget, says: "It lays some foundations for an adequate income security system by introducing an Ontario child benefit. Now there is a basis in terms of a program structure for the continued development of an income security system for low-income people. It's a great day and it's a great change." That was from Michael Mendelson, the senior scholar from the Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

I've talked to my good friend Councillor Doug Peacock. I served with Doug. He is the current of social services for the city of Peterborough. He talked about a great day on March 22, that we're introducing the Ontario child benefit. He said it was a great positive step forward to assist low-income families in the great riding of Peterborough.

Just yesterday, I had the opportunity, on behalf of my good friend the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for a grant of \$3.75 million for a program to invest in new housing and rehabilitate existing housing in the riding of Peterborough. All the housing advocates were applauding that investment as something that is significant for the housing community and housing providers within the great riding of Peterborough.

Also, as a government, in 2003, we got back into the housing business. I remember those eight long, miserable Tory years when the only investment they made in housing was to provide communities and municipalities with a rebate of the provincial sales tax. How cheap could you be, giving a small rebate of the PST for housing providers for those eight long, tough, miserable Tory years? One of the things we decided in 2003 was that we would get back into the housing business on a dollar-for-dollar basis with federal housing programs. In fact, when you look around the riding of Peterborough, we invested—

Mr. Yakabuski: Have you visited them?

Mr. Leal: I've toured all of them, I tell my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I've had the opportunity to see those new housing units in the riding of Peterborough. We have the Woollen Mill project on McDonnell Street; many new units, partnering with the federal government. We have that old Central school in the downtown core of Peterborough that's being turned into new affordable housing. We have the River Ridge project, which was the result of investments after the flood of July 15, 2004.

1750

Let me tell you a story about that flood. Peterborough had two 100-year floods in two years: We had one in 2002 and one in 2004. For the one we had in 2002, the government of the day didn't provide help for Peterborough for six months after the flood. The Premier of the day didn't even have the courtesy to come to see the damage in Peterborough after the flood of 2002.

Let's contrast that with the flood of July 15, 2004. Because Emergency Measures Ontario comes under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, he toured the flood-stricken area the day of the flood in the afternoon. The following day, the Premier of Ontario arrived at 2 p.m. to go and take a look at the flood damage. He was in basements full of sewer water so he could see the experience that people were suffering after that flood of July 15, 2004. Within a matter of months, the Ontario cabinet acted quickly for \$40 million in relief to the city of Peterborough so that we could get back on our feet—not that shameful response that we had in 2002; absolutely shameful. Within days of the flood in 2004, we were there with the dollars

to get Peterborough back on its feet. I salute the Premier and the cabinet of Ontario for that quick action back then in 2004.

Let me turn my attention to the business side of this budget. My friends in the Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce have been talking for years about lifting the business education tax off the businesses of Peterborough to make them more competitive. I'm pleased that in Peterborough's case we'll be lifting almost \$10 million of business education tax off the backs of business and bringing it back to the province where it belongs to make us more competitive.

I want to put on the record a quote from Len Crispino, the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. He said, after the budget introduction on March 22:

"The reduction in BET rates is a major win for businesses in Ontario and will lead to increased productivity, job creation and output. Over 300 communities across this province will benefit from reduced industrial and commercial tax rates totalling \$540 million, including such places"—great communities—"as Sault Ste. Marie, Windsor and Northumberland county. This is a big win for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce."

I remember that the chamber asked the Harris/Eves government to look at that when they were doing what I call the Houdini act: the Who Does What shuffle of services and costs going back and forth. Of course, they also brought in CVA, current value assessment, and they brought in MPAC, which had to be funded 90% by municipalities of Ontario—one of the great off-loading schemes of all time. One of the things that we've been doing over the last four years is uploading some of those costs—uploading land ambulance. Bob Sweet, the warden from Mr. Yakabuski's riding, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, has commended the government for uploading the costs for land ambulance and for public health.

Let us talk about that assessment boondoggle that was brought on by the Conservatives when they did, as I referred to it, that Houdini exercise in 1998. Oh, they said it was cost-neutral, that municipalities wouldn't have to fork out any more dollars. What a sham that was. Municipalities were left holding the bag.

They're in better shape financially today, as we've uploaded those costs—public health, land ambulance, housing—as we continue this exercise over the next number of months to upload additional services that have been on the backs of municipalities.

Let me chat a bit about assessment. We now have a four-year cycle. Averages will be brought in over four years, and increases will be averaged over that period of time.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: Any decreases will be kicked in immediately. I think it's a reasonable approach to take under this mess that was left through MPAC, established by the former government, when the member from Erie-Lincoln—I remember the Magna budget, that Houdini

budget that left us with \$5.6 billion that was hidden. We had to lift the veil. Erik Peters, when we asked him to take a look at it, lifted the veil on that \$5.6 billion. Oh, I remember the member for Erie-Lincoln on that budget day; he was looking pretty spiffy. He had the \$1,000 suit on that day, a nice silk tie, and all of the ministers rode up in those big Cadillacs looking very prosperous, and they all went into that big Magna gymnasium they had with all the lights and the buzzers, all the spin doctors, and they looked—I remember Madam Ecker very well, looking the people of Ontario right in the eye: "Oh, my friends, this is a balanced budget. This is good news for the province of Ontario." But, whoops—a couple of months later, it wasn't a \$1-billion deficit; it wasn't a \$2-billion deficit; it wasn't a \$3-billion deficit; it wasn't a \$4-billion deficit. Folks, what was it? A \$5.6-billion deficit. One of the great shams of all time was that Magna budget when they said it was absolutely balanced.

I want to talk about agriculture for a moment. I had the opportunity to have my good friend the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in Peterborough last Friday, where she delivered a phenomenal speech to the Christian Farmers—a well-received speech. We finally put to rest the myths that were circulating out there about the cut to the agriculture budget. I again refer to table 25, which shows, over our government mandate, that the operational side of the agricultural budget has gone up every year during the four years of our mandate. For emergency assistance to farmers: \$1 billion.

Interjection.

Mr. Leal: I'm going to tell my friend from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke—maybe he should stick to making CDs, because he's not making much of a contribution to the debate today. I say to my friend from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke that he should take the time over this weekend to read the information that's in the budget and he would finally understand how much we are increasing the agriculture budget in the province of Ontario. Plus, if you look at table 25 at the bottom, we're engaged now in very serious talks with the federal Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Strahl, to have Ontario to look at what additional dollars we might be able to provide for a safety net, based on working co-operatively, based on the announcement that Minister Strahl made on March 7, 2007.

When you look at this budget: good for business; it attacks poverty in the province of Ontario.

A couple more quotes here. I am going to talk about Tyler Charlebois, director of advocacy for the College Student Alliance: "After 15 years of underfunding and seeing classrooms and buildings crumble at their feet, the McGuinty government is investing additional funds to renew our learning institutions for the future." That was from Tyler Charlebois.

I want to quote Dr. David Bach, who's president of the Ontario Medical Association: "Doctors Applaud Commitment to Expand Wait Time Strategy...."

"The provincial government has made progress in reducing wait times for a number of specific procedures,

and we are pleased by the commitment to measure all surgical wait times" in the province of Ontario.

Hilda Watkins, the president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation: "Teachers have been pleased to see this government's increased commitment to publicly funded education since its election in 2003. Today's budget recognizes responsibilities beyond the school playground for improving student learning."

My good wife, Karen, a grade 8 teacher in Peterborough, teaches at St. Teresa's. She's an outstanding teacher and does a wonderful job with her students. Just the other day, we were chatting about her school. She said to me, "You know, Jeff, the last four years there's been such a positive learning environment at St. Teresa's in Peterborough." We have a government that's committed to public education. We have a government that is committed to teachers. We have a government that is committed to parents and their kids in these classrooms. She said to me, "It's a real pleasure for me to be in that classroom to renew my passion, to renew my vigour to teach those grade 8 students." Children represent 20% of our population and about 100% of our future. This budget will meet that objective.

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

1800

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given last Thursday by the Minister of Government Services. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or his parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. I recognize the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I want to put in context the questions that I've put forth. It was actually the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal to whom I posed the question, and it was deflected down to the Minister of Government Services. I want to put the question in the context of the questions I put forth on March 22 that preceded the release of the Ombudsman's report of March 26, 2007. I was asking questions with respect to the Georgian Downs shutdown and the slots and the Ontario Racing Commission and racing industry per se. That release of the Ombudsman's report was after my questions.

The Ombudsman came down with a report saying that the lottery is a game of trust which has been broken as the McGuinty government stood by while the lotteries were fixed. What he was saying there was that the OLG was catering to the store owners with respect to making sure that they were getting their ticket sales done so that

they could get the money they need for their operation. In the first paragraph of the executive summary of the Ombudsman's report, he said the government of the day is "addicted to gambling revenues."

There is no doubt, by the way the government and the OLG handled the Georgian Downs shutdown of their racing operation for three months, that the OLG was catering to the racetrack owners at the expense of the racing industry and the workers, 80 to 110 of them who were laid off for that three-month period with respect to the racing industry.

It's fairly obvious that the racetrack owners, if they could just run the operation with the slots, get 20% of the revenues of the slots that come out of that particular racetrack. The agreement that they have signed is with the OLG, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. The intent, when that arrangement was set up by our government of the day, was that 10% of those revenues were going to be supporting the racing industry to enhance it, to make it grow and obviously to create employment in this province.

As I said, when the slot agreements were signed with the OLG, the intent, the formal intent, was a sharing of revenues, that 20% of those revenues that go to the racetrack owners from the slot machines would go to the racing industry. What had happened was that when the Georgian Downs strike occurred, the racing did not occur but the slots stayed open. So the slots and the premise of the government's addiction to gambling revenues was basically solidified with respect to that particular Georgian Downs shutdown, which is one of 18 tracks in this province, one of 16 standardbred tracks in this province. The racetrack was shut down for three months.

My questions that were put forth to actually the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Renewal, who we know is the minister in charge of the OLG, but were deflected and put forth to the Minister of Government Services, were very clearly: "When slot agreements were signed with the OLG, the intention was to link the operation of slots with the success of on-site racing. Minister, why have you taken no measures to ensure that this intent is respected?"

The answer I got was this: "My suspicion is, we very much are likely to do that." "My suspicion." I was asking for a very direct answer to this fundamental issue where we have set up a system with respect to slot machines at the racetracks and a percentage is to go to support the racing industry. He says, "My suspicion is, we very much are likely to do that."

Now, the next question I asked was, "Why have you have taken no action to establish a transparent and accountable relationship between slot agreements and racing dates? The racing was shut down but the slots stayed open for a 90-day strike" at Georgian Downs. The answer I get from the minister is, "... I anticipate meeting in the next few days with the harness racing people to get their input." He anticipates a meeting in the next few days. Maybe the meeting has already taken place; maybe the parliamentary assistant can tell me whether that has

occurred. "But I also am looking—" What does that mean? I'm looking for an answer. That's why we're here late tonight, to get an answer on what is going on with the OLG and slot agreements.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Brampton West–Mississauga, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government Services, now has five minutes to reply.

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): Our government understands the horse racing industry and the vital role it plays in Ontario. It's a \$2-billion industry which is generating 65,000 jobs. Horse racing is an important part of our agricultural sector. The industry supports significant employment and economic benefits to our province.

The slot machines were introduced in 1998 as another stream or form of revenue for this industry. By 2004, almost \$300 million was added to the overall benefit of the industry. Specifically, new revenues were used to increase purses, to invest in the horse improvement program, and to assist various industry associations such as the Ontario Harness Horse Association.

I think it's important to highlight a few examples of the great successes in the industry. Ontario has a very rich history in horse racing. Just over the last year, there have been many achievements, including the following: A horse named Glidemaster, an Ontario-owned, Ontario-trained horse, won the trotting triple crown and was named US horse of the year in 2006. Another horse, Majestic Son, is another great example. Majestic Son is

an Ontario-sired, Ontario-owned and Ontario-trained horse, and won the Breeders' Crown at Woodbine last year. It has also won the Canadian Trotting Classic and was named Canada's horse of the year in 2006.

I can go on and on with examples, but I want to just mention one more. Mr. Feelgood is an Ontario-sired, Ontario-owned and Ontario-trained horse who is the first Ontario-sired horse to ever win the US Little Brown Jug, which is considered pacing's most prestigious race.

The member has also mentioned the ORC. The role of the Ontario Racing Commission was established in 2000 through the Racing Commission Act. The ORC is an arm's-length organization responsible for regulating horse racing in Ontario. As well, the ORC ensures public confidence and integrity in the industry and plays an active role in protecting the health and safety of horses. This includes licensing and approving live race dates for all racetracks in the province. The commission reviews all race date applications and makes a determination on dates based on the best interests of the industry.

The McGuinty government will continue to work with the ORC and all industry stakeholders to ensure continued strength, growth and long-term prosperity of the horse racing industry in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to have been carried. This House stands adjourned until 6:45 p.m., later on this evening.

The House adjourned at 1809.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Mardi 27 mars 2007



Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 27 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 27 mars 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion respecting the consideration of concurrences and the Supply Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Gerretsen is asking for unanimous consent to move a motion respecting the consideration of concurrences and the Supply Act. Is it the consent of the House to allow him to do that? Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you to the members of the House for giving unanimous consent.

The motion states:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, the orders for concurrence in supply for the Ministries of Community and Social Services; Finance; Health and Long-Term Care; Health Promotion; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Public Infrastructure Renewal; Training, Colleges and Universities, and order G188, second reading of Bill 188, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007, may be called concurrently; and

That when such orders are called, they shall be considered concurrently in a single debate; and

That the time available to 9:20 p.m. this evening shall be divided equally among the recognized parties; and

That, at the conclusion of the debate, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the order for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries named above, and to dispose of all remaining stages of Bill 188; and

If a recorded vote is requested by five members, all divisions shall be stacked, and there shall be a single 10-minute division bell.

That's the motion, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Gerretsen has moved that, notwithstanding any standing order, the orders for concurrence in supply for the Ministries of Community and Social Services—dispense?

Interjection: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker: Dispensed. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

SUPPLY ACT, 2007

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2007

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I move concurrence in supply for the following ministries: Community and Social Services; Finance; Health and Long-Term Care; Health Promotion; Municipal Affairs and Housing; Public Infrastructure Renewal; and Training, Colleges and Universities; and I move second reading of Bill 188, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007.

1850

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Finance to lead off the debate.

Applause.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: A rare round of applause from my friend from Barrie, Mr. Tascona.

It's a pleasure for me to begin this debate on supply, which is obviously a unique and important motion because it provides the authority of this Legislature to make virtually all of the expenditures that we make throughout the year. Tonight we are authorizing, if this Legislature approves, expenditures that allow us to make all those payments, scheduled and unscheduled, to hospitals and doctors, municipalities, Ontario Works recipients and children's aid societies, just to name a few of the programs.

But I'd like to be able to use the time available for me to talk about supply within the context of the budget that we recently presented in this Legislature. I said at the time that the budget was one that we could all celebrate, one that was as welcome as spring. On this magnificent, glorious spring evening here in Toronto, I want to spend just a few minutes, if I could, talking about some of the major impacts of the bill.

I don't understand the hand motions from my friend from Barrie. Is it still Barrie?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Well, it sounds to me like members of the opposition are anxious for this debate to wrap up quickly. I am not going to take too much of their

time or your time. I'm simply going to make a few points on the major themes of the budget and let you know how proud we were, as a government, to be able to present this budget, and what a strong and powerful and comforting reception this budget has received in every corner of the province.

As I said during the budget speech, the real theme of the budget is that Ontario has now entered a period of new economic strength. In the 40 minutes during my presentation, I was really making one point, and that is what we are going to do now that we've reached this new plateau of new economic strength.

Probably the first and most important thing is that the province has now regained financial health: We are on the positive side of the balance sheet. We presented a balanced budget and we presented projections for a balanced budget for the foreseeable future—"as far as the eye can see," as one economist said—and that is very good news. It's good news in particular because it represents, really, the culmination of three and a half years of very intense work from the government, the members on this side of the aisle and, I would even suggest, to be charitable and to be frank, the work of the members on the other side of the aisle as well, because, notwithstanding the huffing and puffing, they know, as the people of Ontario know, that to get out of that area of dark and dismal deficits and to move to a period of strong and sustainable surpluses reflects a government that is, I think, doing an A-one job of managing the province's finances. I think that was the most significant piece of news on budget day: that we started off with a deficit of \$5.5 billion three and a half years ago—\$5.5 billion: much larger than anyone had anticipated.

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): No more Magna budgets.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend mentions the Magna budget, the last budget from the Conservative government. With all the pomp and ceremony that they put in a budget that they presented at an auto parts manufacturing plant, they said, "We're balanced here. We've got a balanced budget." They didn't present that budget here in the Legislature, and that was probably their first mistake. The bigger mistake was the plugging of the numbers.

So we were elected, the former Auditor General did a report, and they brought very bad news to the Premier—who sits right here where my parliamentary assistant is sitting now: a deficit of \$5.5 billion. So we worked every single day to get ourselves out of that very deep hole, and it was just a few days ago that I was pleased to announce that we're finally there. We are finally in an era of much stronger fiscal management in this province. That work has been long; it has been directed; it has been disciplined. The management of our finances has been prudent from day one.

But that's just where we are today. The budget also spoke about what we're going to do as we allocate this new economic strength. There are really three points to make, if I can summarize them. The first is that we're going to continue with the plan that we adopted on the

day we were sworn in. We're going to continue to invest in the public services that the people of this province care about. We are going to continue to make our schools, in every corner of the province, better places to learn. I invite my friends opposite, I invite the people of the province, to take a little bit of time and visit the school in their community. Talk to teachers, talk to vice-principals, talk to principals, talk to administrators—

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): To parents.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Talk to parents, as my friend from Perth-Middlesex says. I think everyone will agree that our schools today are better places to learn. That was the mission that we were sent to take on the day that we were sworn in. We've made marvellous progress and we're going to continue down that path.

We are going to continue to make investments in our health care system. I remember back four years ago when the great debate in this province was whether or not Ontario could any more afford, could any more want, could any more manage a universal, publicly funded health care system. The debate was, "Maybe it should just all be privatized." Today, we have a health care system that is a tribute to Tommy Douglas and Lester Pearson and all of the great leaders in Canada who have said that this is the signature of this great nation.

Five hundred thousand Ontarians who didn't have a family doctor three and a half years ago now have a family doctor. The delivery of primary care has been transformed. We are opening community health centres around the province. We're in the midst of an historic period of renewing and building and rebuilding our hospitals in every corner of the province.

So we're continuing to invest in health care, in education, in post-secondary education. In our budget, we had the strength to devote almost \$400 million in new resources to colleges and universities around the province.

We're also using Ontario's new economic strength to add to our economic capacity. We're doing that in a number of ways, but I think one of the most important, and one of the ones that brought the greatest pleasure to me, was the fact that for the first time our government was able to announce a significant reduction in the taxes that the people and businesses of this province pay to government—half \$1 billion of reduction in business education taxes.

I just want to spend a minute to explain why it is that we went after the structure and the unfairness of business education taxes. My friend next door to me here from Perth-Middlesex—his community of Middlesex has a much lower rate of business education tax than the community right next door in London. My own community of Vaughan has a much lower rate of business education tax than all the businesses just across Steeles Avenue in the city of Toronto. It was unfair. It didn't make any sense. Every commentator had made the point repeatedly that it was time to clean up that system, so we decided in this budget to move, over a period of seven years, to a single rate: 1.6% will be the rate when our

program is finally and fully implemented. More importantly—

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Right across the board.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Yes. As my friend from Peterborough says, right across the province.

Mr. Wilkinson: People are going to vote against that? I can't believe that.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend Mr. Wilkinson makes a good point. I hope my friends opposite will be standing in their place and voting for that measure. It actually represents for businesses in Ontario a tax reduction of over half a billion dollars.

1900

We also, in the budget, began the initiatives that, as the Premier has said so often, will be part of the defining challenge of our generation, and that is the issue of climate change and global warming. I am not going to get into all of the details of those programs, but I do want to say, before I cede the floor to my friends in the Conservative Party, that one of the most significant things we were able to do in the budget was to finally, appropriately and comprehensively address the issue of poverty in this province. It has been many, many years indeed in this province since a government has stood up and said, "Poverty is our issue and we need to come to grips with it." I listened this afternoon to—you'll forgive my language—the rantings of the leader of the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Tascona: I haven't heard him all night.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: My friend says, "I haven't heard him all night." That would be a blessing. I am so proud of the fact that the centrepiece of this budget was an allocation of some \$2.1 billion to help kids in this province, kids that—to be very frank, let's use clear language—are living in poverty. Most of us do not see this poverty as we move through the streets of Toronto, London, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Cornwall, Sault Ste. Marie or Etobicoke. It's too invisible to us, and it's been invisible to government for far too long. In this budget we are transforming social welfare. We are transforming the way we support those of the most meagre means. From now on, there will be no children on welfare. From now on, whether or not we as a government provide support for children will be determined based solely on need. This initiative means that, for the first time, mom and dad—or mom alone or dad alone—who happen to be on assistance from government through Ontario Works and have the opportunity to get a job and begin the climb up the ladder of success will not have to worry about losing benefits because those benefits will continue to flow to those kids until such time as mom and dad are able to support those kids without the support of the state. That was the centrepiece of our budget.

But we didn't stop just with children; we provided additional support for those who are looking for affordable housing. Some 27,000 families will receive additional support, up to \$1,200 a year, to help pay the rent. We're providing additional support for injured workers because for far too long their benefits have not kept pace. We're

providing additional assistance to those who do the most challenging work of anyone in this province, and that is to see to the needs of those who suffer from developmental disabilities of one sort or another in community living situations right around the province.

We're providing significant new resources for our schools, for our hospitals, for our colleges and universities. We're on the right road. We've made great progress with this budget.

As I address the members of this House and ask them to vote in favour of this supply motion, I am really asking them to remember the hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people whose lives will be improved because of the initiatives we have been able to put together, because of Ontario's new economic strength, and I—I'm looking for the right word and I'm not going to find it. I commend this motion in supply and the bills associated with it to this House and all of its members, and I hope all of its members will be able to support it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Tascona: I'm pleased to join in the debate. It's quite the occasion here tonight at the Legislature. I just want to put a word in for the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada. In Barrie on Saturday, we had a fundraiser for them—it was a bowl-a-thon—and I was pleased to participate in that with my family. They were here tonight giving out certificates of appreciation and I was very pleased to accept one. I think they do a great job and we're very pleased with the work of the Barrie chapter for the Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Mr. Leal: How did you bowl, Joe?

Mr. Tascona: My bowling wasn't as good as it usually is but I was competitive, just like the Colts, unlike the Petes because they're out. The Colts are playing tonight. It's their third game and I hope they'll be going up 3-0.

This supply motion put forth by the member from Vaughan certainly is an interesting twist to the budget. I'd have to say, though, with respect, that we were a little bit underwhelmed in the Barrie area with respect to that budget. I actually presented in front of Mr. Hoy and the finance committee. I don't know whether Mr. Arthurs, your PA, was there at those presentations. I made a very strong pitch for funding for Lake Simcoe. I was pleased to see that Peter Van Loan, who is the member from York-Simcoe, was there. The federal government provided \$12 million towards Lake Simcoe and dealing with the phosphorus. We were very disappointed. I say that to the minister quite straightforwardly. Lake Simcoe needs to be helped. It needs to have funding to clean it up and make it the gem that it is, that serves the area all the way down to Sutton and all the way up to Barrie in that Lake Simcoe body of water.

That was one area where I was fairly disappointed, because if anyone has been to Barrie, you realize that Barrie has one of the premier waterfronts, if not in Ontario, in all of North America. I was very pleased, when I was on council—I served from 1991 to 1995—that we were able to secure from CN all the lands from

the Tiffin boat launch all the way over to Minet's Point to preserve those properties at the Southshore Community Centre to make sure that we had all of the water and waterfront lands. Barrie's waterfront is all in public hands, essentially, and we're very proud of that. I was very proud to be on council to make that happen in terms of protecting Barrie's waterfront. But, as I say, I'm very disappointed that the provincial budget didn't provide any money for Lake Simcoe, and we need that.

Certainly we were a little bit underwhelmed also with respect to the gridlock. I know the minister knows that because he's the representative from Vaughan. I know they're going to be doing some work on the HOV lanes with respect to the 400 down by Major Mackenzie. Quite frankly, the plan we had when we were in government was to have a designated lane for buses and transportation in the expansion of Highway 400 to get more vehicles down quickly to promote public transit. That was the focal point: to promote public transit with designated bus lanes to get the commuters in my area down to Toronto. That wasn't addressed in the budget. In fact, the gridlock that is facing people—and I do that every day, from Barrie down to Toronto—is not going to be alleviated. The budget falls far short in terms of addressing gridlock.

Also, we were very disappointed in terms of dealing with the needs at RVH, which is a regional hospital serving, in terms of its cancer care centre and cancer services, as far north as my good friend from Parry Sound—Muskoka, Norm Miller. We need an expansion of that hospital, and it's not to happen until 2008-09. With the great fundraising that has been going on in the community, we were hopeful that the budget would address the capital needs and push forward the date for that expansion. By the time we get that work done, we're going to need a second-phase expansion of Royal Victoria Hospital to deal with the population growth. The government of the day says that Barrie is a growth area, yet we don't see any funding coming in for our health care services; we don't see any funding coming in to deal with our gridlock; we don't see any real plan to deal with preserving and maintaining the quality of Lake Simcoe.

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One of the biggest pressures that we have is court services. We had the Ontario Bar Association up in my area to deal with the court services problem, because there's a shortage of justices of the peace. At least three justices of the peace are needed to deal with the court backlog in my area. One of the fundamental problems has to do with family law, because we have 1.5 judges dedicated to dealing with the family law mediation system that was designed to make sure that the process is expedited to deal with family disputes. Unlike the city of Hamilton, which has five judges dedicated to the family court system, we have 1.5 judges, and that doesn't deal with the problems we face in a rapidly expanding area and the need for the court system to work. It's not working, with the lack of justices of the peace and the lack of judges to deal with family disputes.

We are looking forward to GO Transit. Everyone in our area is looking forward to GO Transit's return. I've worked very hard for that return since 1995 when I was first elected. Actually, GO Transit was removed by the NDP government of the day in their 1992 budget. They stopped the service to Barrie, and we were able to maintain the track. The federal Liberal government of the day in 1996 was going to tear out the track from not only Orillia but down to Newmarket. We were able, with the help of Premier Harris and Finance Minister Eves at the time, to secure the funding to make sure that the track was kept in the ground from Barrie to Newmarket. What we have today is the return of GO Transit to the Barrie area, hopefully in the fall of this year. I know it's going to be very successful with the amount of population growth that we've had since it was first introduced. I think Barrie had about 50,000 in the early 1990s. Now it's approaching the 125,000 to 130,000 range. There's no doubt that it's going to be successful.

Certainly, dealing with the needs of my riding, there are pressures in terms of the environment. I mentioned Lake Simcoe. There are also plans for an ethanol plant in our area, which is causing a lot of concern. There's going to be a meeting tomorrow night at the Southshore Community Centre, which I am planning to attend, which the city of Barrie is looking at. I know the Ministry of the Environment will have to look at this particular project to make sure it meets the standards to deal with this, but certainly there's a lot of concern in my area with respect to that plant. I'm very concerned too in terms of the air quality that's going to be dealt with with respect to that facility. That's what the meeting is going to be about tomorrow night.

Also, dealing with the budget, quite frankly, the budget will be balanced this year if the government doesn't have to use the reserves. There's a striking contingency plan in terms of whether this is a balanced budget: a balanced budget "if." Unlike the comments made by the Minister of Finance, I don't share his view that he couldn't have balanced the budget much sooner than he did. When they took over power in the 2003-04 fiscal year, we were only six months into that fiscal year. They made sure that that deficit was torqued up and they never solved it, to their own political gain.

As far as I'm concerned, one of the biggest promises they broke was the health tax they brought in of \$2.5 billion every year. They broke their promise that they weren't going to increase taxes, and in the one area they bring in—my good friend talks about child poverty. That tax kicks in at \$20,000. For all the families that have to pay that health tax, if that tax was removed, we would have a much better situation for families with young children across the province and even people who are single in terms of the punitive measures with respect to that health tax. That health tax has to be removed. In the wisdom of the Liberal government, when Bob Nixon was the finance minister, he got rid of it. He realized that that was a bad tax and people shouldn't be taxed for their health care. And what do we see? The very first measure

the Liberal McGuinty government brings in is a health tax. They never talked about it during the campaign. They said, "We won't raise your taxes," but they bring in the health tax. That was a major promise broken in that campaign.

In closing—because I only have so much time—I want to talk about that property assessment the minister's talking about. That is going to be a disaster in my area, where we've seen assessment go up between 14% to 16% every year. Four years down the road, people in my area are going to be seeing 60% to 70% assessment tax increases, and the government's going to say, "You've got four years to pay that off." A lot of good that's going to do. What we need is a very stable system with respect to people being able to stay in their homes. The 5% cap that was put forth by John Tory will allow people to stay in their homes.

In my area, we're going to be looking at about a 70% property tax increase by the time this four-year freeze comes off with respect to what the Liberal government's proposing. It's punitive, it's not workable, and I can tell you that a lot of people are going to lose their homes because of this approach to property tax assessment.

I don't support the budget. It did nothing for my riding of Barrie. It did nothing for the hard-working families of this province by keeping the health care tax. It's going to cost a lot of people their homes with respect to this approach to property tax assessment in this province.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): It is a pleasure and a privilege every year to stand here and talk about a budget.

First of all, I should preface my remarks to the actual vote that's going to take place here later tonight. This is interim supply. Interim supply is related to the budget, just so people can understand what's happening tonight. Probably every speaker, including the Minister of Finance, talked about the budget, but in fact the vote tonight will be on interim supply. In interim supply, we are going to be voting on whether or not to fund all of those branches of government, all of those ministries, all of those departments, even the Legislature, the Premier's office and everything else. It's in terms of keeping the government going.

There is no doubt in my mind it will pass. In fact, it probably needs to pass. We have thousands of people who are employed by the government who need to get their paycheques, and the wheels of this province need to keep turning. That's what we are going to debate today. But I am not going to be any different than my Conservative colleagues or the Minister of Finance, because the reality is not to talk about the issue before us today—

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: The member from Brant is a little concerned, but I welcome him to talk about interim supply when he gets a few minutes to do so because I doubt very much that that in fact will happen at all here tonight. The real issue behind interim supply is of course where the money is going to be spent.

This is where I, as a member of this Legislature, have some considerable difficulty. A month ago, people asked me what would be in the budget, and I had to give them the opinion that of course the Minister of Finance never would consult with me. As a member of the finance committee, we would travel across the province. We went to places in the far north, in southern Ontario and here in Toronto, Hamilton and Belleville. We went to Kenora—Rainy River. We went everywhere, talking to ordinary citizens about what they thought should be in the budget. We, as a committee made up of Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats, spent some considerable time trying to put in the form of motions what we wanted to be contained within the budget. Every year we do this, and every year we present a blueprint, an idea, a platform for the minister to include in his budget.

Quite frankly, I oftentimes despair because those ordinary citizens who come out to depute before our committee, who have earnest desires to be included in the budget, often receive short shrift by the time the minister stands up here in the Legislature and delivers his budget. I say "his" because the minister is a male, and we're hoping in some short time or period to again have a woman as the finance minister. In any event, he stands up and gives very short shrift to what was anticipated by ordinary Ontarians, what was asked for by communities, community groups and ordinary people, and the dreams that they had at the time of the budget process. It has taken a long time, and expectations, I would suggest, have been dashed.

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A few days before the budget was released—as always, I get my Toronto papers delivered at home and I look at the front page, particularly at the Toronto Star, which has that unique capacity of knowing everything that the Liberal government is going to do before the backbenchers in this very same government even know what they're going to do themselves. When I read the Toronto Star in the morning, it said that there are going to be great things happening, that there is going to be a \$10.25 minimum wage. The finance minister doesn't stand up to tell me that first; the Toronto Star tells me that first. And the Toronto Star tells me first that there is going to be an end to the clawback, something which I have asked precisely 52 times in questions and in petitions in this Legislature for three and a half years—52 times that has been raised by me and a couple of my colleagues, but mostly me. And I look at that and think, "What a wonderful thing," if you are to believe the Toronto Star. The Toronto Star also announced that the Liberal budget is going to put an end to poverty.

This all happens not at the time when the minister stands up but in the two, three or four days before, because there are some judicious leaks. I must assume that they come from either the Premier's office or from the office of the finance minister, because I do not know who else would be able to put this information forward with any kind of credibility that would cause Canada's

number one, leading, largest newspaper to print it so boldly and so accurately on the front page.

So I have to tell you that for a few brief moments and a few brief days, my heart leapt that in fact this government had found its roots, that the Liberals had gone back to the time when Liberals actually cared about the poor and when Liberals actually did something to alleviate the poverty and the destitution that so often pervades our province.

You can imagine what happened to all of those hopes, what happened to all of those dreams that people in Ontario had and the expectations they had that were highlighted, that were broadcast and that were put on the front page of the *Toronto Star* when the minister rose in his seat on budget day to announce what they were actually going to do. All of us in Ontario were expecting real action, and we had anticipated that real action through the various leaks, and the Minister of Finance coming forward and saying that he had discovered and that he was championing the issue of poverty reduction. We had some great hopes, but, as I said, those were dashed, they were broken, they fell and they went crashing down as that one-hour litany of what this government stands for and what it wants to do unfolded on budget day.

On budget day, when I walked outside, some people actually said that they thought it was a good budget, people of whom I ordinarily would have thought, "How could you say that? You have been asking for things that have not been delivered and yet you still think it's a good budget."

I want to tell you, the spin was absolutely effective on that day. The spin was absolutely wonderful. I commend the Minister of Finance for the spin on which he put virtually meaningless promises forward. He put on such a spin that people thought that something really wonderful was about to be undertaken and that their lives would instantaneously change. In fact, nothing of that reality was going to happen.

I'd just like to go through 10 of the things that disappointed me most in this budget. The first one, of course, was the \$10 minimum wage. New Democrats have been arguing about that and fighting about that and doing town hall meetings about that and going out to communities and liaising with labour and other groups and immigrant groups, talking about the \$10 minimum wage and how important it was. There I was, sitting there, listening intently to the minister in this very chamber, and all I heard was, "Yeah, we're going to do \$10.25." "One-upmanship," I thought. "That's really good, \$10.25," until I heard the details. It isn't \$10 minimum wage now. It isn't meeting poverty goals now. It isn't giving people an opportunity and a real chance in this wonderful province of Ontario now. It's about doing it incrementally over a number of years to watch inflation take it away. It's okay to leave them at \$8 an hour, which is thousands upon thousands of dollars below minimum wage, and then next year you're going to give them \$8.75, and then you're going to give them \$9.50, and then you're going to give

them \$10.25. Your goal, I guess, is to get there someday, but I want to say to all of you that what you have done is you have condemned those very people to poverty for at least three years until you get around to the goal, which I would have hoped was doable today. I fail to understand.

I have not talked very much in the Legislature—I know some of my colleagues in the NDP have—but the unseemly haste in raising our salaries was pretty fast. The wait for people who earn minimum wage and who live in poverty is excruciatingly slow. I have to ask the Liberals why you think, when you juxtapose one position against the other, that it is okay to raise your own salary by 25% in less than a week.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): It's your salary too.

Mr. Prue: No, it's not my salary too—your salary. It's unseemly haste to raise the salaries of MPPs in one week but it takes three long years to raise the salaries of working individuals, immigrants, mostly women, mostly young people over a period of some three years. So I have to tell you I was extremely disappointed. Although I had some great hope, I was extremely disappointed in how that played out and in fact how you decided to do it.

The second thing which is very dear to my heart is the whole issue of property taxation. There are many people across this province who feel that property taxes are an abomination in this province. If you look at the statistics for Canada, you will note that Ontarians pay the highest property taxes of any province in this country. We pay the highest property taxes, and there is a reason for that. The reason, quite frankly, is that the former government—that of Mr. Harris particularly, but also Mr. Eves—downloaded onto the municipalities a whole bunch of stuff.

Interjection.

Mr. Prue: Our taxes are the highest, Mr. Minister. If you don't know that, you shouldn't be sitting in that seat, because our taxes are the highest in Canada. You know that's true. You know it's true, and you've done nothing, absolutely nothing, to alleviate anything for the property taxpayer.

So I hoped, when the Minister of Finance stood up in his seat and said he was going to do something, that the Liberals at last had a bold and imaginative plan. I listened to my colleague the member from Erie-Lincoln on behalf of the Conservative Party. He had a plan. I don't particularly appreciate his plan; I don't think it's a good plan. But he had something in which he wanted to cap the taxes at 5%. That was his plan. He has boldly gone around the province and he has tried to argue what a good plan that is, and I leave that to him. I thought that we in the New Democratic Party had a much broader plan, which was a six-part plan. Of course, the minister likes five parts but not one of them. Our plan involved, amongst other things, the freeze of properties until the time of sale. Our plan involved an upload of some \$3.2 billion to take it off the property taxpayers. It involved a plan of giving money and consideration to people who lived in apartments. It involved helping seniors and

others to remain in their homes. It involved a whole holistic policy towards taxation.

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So when I listened—and I listened intently to the Minister of Finance and what he was going to do—I have to tell you, I was extremely disappointed again, because in fact he is proposing to do virtually nothing. Instead of doing a yearly upgrade on what the taxes are for individual properties, he promises now to do it only once every four years. Once every four years he's going to raise the taxes and then incrementally raise them over the four-year period until he does it again. In fact, this is a lot of pain for very little gain for most property owners. If that is the plan, it virtually does nothing. So I have to tell you, again, I was very disappointed. I hoped against hope—

Mr. Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): So what would you do, Mike?

Mr. Prue: They're asking me what I'm going to do. I just explained. You should listen. We have a plan that's going to do a lot of things for a lot of people, but it is not as simplistic as your own. It is a six-part process that needs to be implemented together.

Then I looked at the clawback. I have asked—and I said this 52 times in this Legislature in the last three years, either me individually or my colleagues in conjunction, asking questions of various Ministers of Community and Social Services and the finance minister and the Premier—what they are going to do about the clawback. I had some great hopes when I read the Toronto Star. I thought something was finally going to be done about the clawback, and in fact, I was disappointed again. Because although there is now a plan—if one can believe the plan—it's going to be phased in over five years; not four years, at the end of the next government, but into the government beyond that. That's how long it's going to take to end the clawback.

This is a heinous practice, and I choose my word advisedly. It is a heinous practice for this government to continue what Mike Harris did and take money from the poorest children, take it off them, and for the reality—I know not what that reality is, except that you need the money for other programs. You are taking that money and you are going to continue to do that, albeit at a reduced level, over five years, should you—

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Four times as much money to twice as many children.

Mr. Prue: “Four times as much money to twice as many children” is the answer that comes from the finance minister. But in the end, Mr. Finance Minister, please do not deny that those poor children who have the unmitigated gall to be born to the families of those on Ontario Works or ODSP are not going to get the full value of what you are doing to the same extent that the children of the working poor are going to get. They are not going to get it. It is going to take you five years, and even at the end of the five years, according to the economists with whom I have consulted since you stood in your place, they are still going to be clawed back by

your government, should you have the opportunity of re-election.

This, to me, is not a thing of which I can be proud. It is not a thing of which any Ontarian can be proud, that a federal government that is intent upon reducing or eliminating child poverty is going to see this government in Ontario continue that practice. It should have been ended; it ought to have been ended. The Premier promised in advance of the last election that it would be ended, and in the entire term of this government, for four years, it will not be ended. In fact, if you are lucky enough to be elected again in October, it will not be ended in your next mandate in its entirety either. That, to me, is a mistake.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: Four times as much money.
Mr. Prue: He says again, “Four times as much money,” but you're not ending the clawback. Stand up and tell me you're ending the clawback. You can't and you won't, because you are not, and that is the reality. You are not ending the clawback.

As welcome as I would say—and there were people out there in the hall who were talking about your new program. I think your new program is not bad. I think it's not bad, but you're not ending the clawback.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): We're going beyond that.

Mr. Prue: You're not going beyond the clawback. You are not ending the clawback to the poorest kids who are born and who live in families of OW and ODSP recipients, and that, to me, is a wrong thing to do. Those are not unequal children; those are children who deserve every bit as much support as the working poor. Those are children with whom I grew up in Regent Park. I know those kids; you know those kids. Mr. Minister, you must know them, and you know that you cannot differentiate between one group and another. That, unfortunately, is what your budget has done.

Hon. Mr. Sorbara: And that is the magic of this system.

Mr. Prue: I'm being told that his system is magic. I do not find it to be magic, because if it was magic I would expect something to be drawn out of a hat, and I do not see anything being drawn out of a hat.

I go on to ODSP and welfare. I was hoping something would happen here, because this was a poverty budget. The Minister of Finance told me that this was a poverty budget. I thought, “Well, finally.” His first budget, I thought, went a little bit of a distance. And I have to tell you: Your first budget, Mr. Minister, wasn't too bad. You increased welfare rates 3% in your first budget, something that hadn't been done for eight solid years in the previous government, which had frozen it, which had reduced it, which had treated welfare and ODSP people with utter contempt. You raised it 3%, and I could say that at least that was something. I remember sitting here in my seat and saying, “Thank God something has been done.”

But then your next budget, your second budget, contained nothing. Your third budget contained 2%, but they

had to wait till November, which meant, in reality, they got 1%, because they got it for half a year. And then in this budget, it's 2% again, but it's in November, which is only 1%. The reality is that unless you have some children, unless there is some other hook that you have within the system, if you are a single person on OW or ODSP, you are worse off in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario than you were in the worst days of Mike Harris. That is what I think is a disgrace.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: You don't mean that.

Mr. Prue: I do mean that, and you know it's true, too. Does anyone over there think it's not true? It's absolutely true. If you do not have any children, if you do not have issue, if you do not have an opportunity to get money—because there are other sources—then you are worse off today than you were under the worst days of Mike Harris. So I was disappointed in that aspect of your budget too, Mr. Minister. I'm looking right in your face: I'm disappointed with that too.

I'm very disappointed in what I saw or didn't see in the budget around IBI. I know you're spending some more money and I've seen what you are doing, but I also see that the court cases are ongoing. I also see that you're continuing to take families to court, and that there is an IBI waiting list that is growing, it appears to me, by leaps and bounds.

I've talked to some of my neighbours. I talked to a very nice family who lives in my community who has one child with autism, and he is, at the age of six, in the opinion of the family, being forced out of the safe sinecure, the confines—

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: No, that's not right.

Mr. Prue: No, it is right; that's what's happening. She feels her son is being forced out, and she is resisting it with all of the force and the strength that she has as a mother. She's not alone; we have received other letters in that regard as well. But I am very disappointed that the government continues to spend untold millions of dollars taking these families to court when in fact it is the children who need the funds.

I looked at child care. The child care people were enthusiastic out there in the hall. I continue to wonder why. I am perplexed. I've asked them, "Why are you so supportive of this budget?" They said, "There's \$25 million in the budget." That would be all well and good if there was \$25 million in the budget. I guess there is, because you are passing on some of the federal monies to them, and I guess they should be thankful for that. But I have to ask—and I have yet to hear from any of your officials or from the minister himself—what happened to the other monies that were given by the federal government. What happened to the \$100 million that was given by this Conservative government in Ottawa to Ontario for child care? What happened to the \$63 million that was contained within the budget? We've seen \$25 million; I'm thankful for that. But what happened to the rest? Where is the other \$137 million? And the child care advocates, who were, on day one of your budget, quite happy to see \$25 million, are now starting to question,

and have questioned me, and I question you: Where is the balance? Where is the money? There's certainly nothing new from you. There is some money being passed down from the federal government—a portion of it. But there's nothing in your government's budget where you are spending any of your own money on this very vital service.

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I look to the municipalities. I came from a municipal background, and with all my heart, I have never heard a single person in this government—and I have asked you in committee, I have asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs in committee—dismiss what the Association of Municipalities of Ontario has said about the downloaded services. They put it at \$3.2 billion. Your minister has agreed it's somewhere close to there. I remember asking the former finance minister in the hiatus what it was, and he didn't deny it was \$3.2 billion. And I've asked you the same question in committee, Mr. Minister, whether it's \$3.2 billion, and I had never had a denial that that's the amount of money that is downloaded unfairly to the municipalities.

I looked at this budget, and we had great, huge hopes that something would be done. What I get from Liberals all the time is, "We're doing things, incrementally very small, little, tiny things. We are going to finally pay our fair share of the land ambulance," as if you shouldn't have all the time. "We're going to pay our fair share of the 75% that we're supposed to pay for public health," as if you shouldn't have all the time.

Mr. Patten: Oh, come on. We don't do it, and you're yelling and screaming.

Mr. Prue: I yell and scream because you don't do it.

The question is, what are you doing about the \$3.2 billion that has been very carefully documented by the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and that not one person in your cabinet has ever denied is true—not one person? As many times as I have ever asked the question in as many locations as it has ever been asked, I have never heard once a denial that the municipalities of this province are owed some \$3.2 billion for servicing your programs.

The city of Toronto came out yesterday and I think hit the nail pretty squarely on the head. They talked about the downloaded services that the people in the city of Toronto are going to be required to pay. They put the figure for three programs at \$71 million. I was pleased to see that one of your colleagues, the member from Scarborough Centre, Mr. Duguid, came out and said that there may be some more money, although it was not contained in the budget. If it is going to come, I invite the minister to stand up in reply—because he gets two minutes—to tell the good people of the city of Toronto—the mayor and the council—that \$71 million is going to accrue to them from the province because the city of Toronto is covering off the housing, welfare payments and child care payments to the tune of \$71 million, which are totally provincial programs, where you have not paid what you were supposed to pay. I listened and I read the

newspaper today, where one of the members of the city council put a turn of phrase—and I quote her only. She called the Premier a deadbeat Premier, just like the whole program you have about deadbeat fathers, about deadbeat parents, when they owe but they don't pay. She put it in very succinct and very easy-to-understand terms that in fact your government is not paying what it is supposed to for what is needed for the programs that the city of Toronto is delivering. That can be, of course, expanded by 450 times to every single municipality in this province, because every single municipality in this province is paying, through their property taxation, that \$3.2 billion in total towards provincial government programs which you are not paying for. Quite frankly, I think that if this budget is balanced—and I take the minister at his word that it is—it is on the basis that you are balancing it on the backs of the property taxpayers in those municipalities, because without the \$3.2 billion that you are unfairly making them assess, unfairly making them collect and unfairly taking from the municipalities, that budget would be some \$3 billion in arrears.

I listened intently to the whole issue of jobs and job creations. There wasn't much there. The members opposite, particularly the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, are often talking about the number of jobs created in Ontario. But, quite frankly, we are concerned about the 140,000 manufacturing jobs that have been lost in Ontario in the last two years. These are jobs that are gone and may indeed never come back. We are at a loss to understand the crisis in the farming community and the farmers who often seem to be very much at odds with this government, the farmers who say that they are not getting adequate subsidies or support from this government. We are at a loss to understand the whole crisis in forestry, which seems to be endemic and which this government seems singularly unable to solve. We are at a loss to understand the crisis that is affecting all of northern Ontario, where not only a loss of population but a loss of jobs, a loss of finance and a loss of will appears to be occurring. This government seems unwilling or unable to take the necessary steps.

I looked as well at what was happening in the environment. Again, I was disappointed because those monies that were given by the federal government—some \$580 million—have not been expended. I did read and I do know what the minister has to say and what other government officials are saying: to wait for two weeks; there's going to be a major announcement where that is going happen. But we have taken some \$580 million in federal money. That, in and of itself, is enough to shut down Nanticoke, but we're not shutting down Nanticoke. It is, in and of itself, literally enough money to solve most of the environmental problems in this province, yet there is no indication to date that they will be solved.

So I await whatever is going to be said in a week or two weeks or whenever the Minister of the Environment or the Minister of Finance is going to stand up and say where those monies are going to be expended, and I hope they're expanded well. But in the end, I'm also waiting

for something which cannot happen, because the budget is out, and that is for this government to say that they're going to spend some of their own money on the environment. They're not going to spend any of their own money; these are all flow-through dollars that are going to be spent perhaps in a week or two, because there is nothing in this budget that this government has committed any of its own money to in the province of Ontario when it comes to the environment.

I've left the last one to the end on purpose, because I really want to talk about that, if my colleague from Hamilton East will allow me, and that is the whole issue of housing. It is very near and dear to my heart. As I have said many times in this Legislature, and I will say it again, I am a boy from Regent Park. I know what it's like to grow up in public housing, and I know the importance of that public housing to poor people. I know how that public housing can make a real difference to families and how kids, who otherwise would live in hovels and slums, can have an opportunity for decent housing. I am really upset and almost ashamed at what is happening in this province.

The federal government put forward some \$392 million for housing. In this budget, we had a great announcement that \$392 million was going to be spent; that is, the federal money is going to be spent and the province is going to give nothing, absolutely nothing. I don't know how I can be more succinct than that—nothing. But the \$392 million at least is finally going to be spent, because it has been sitting in the bank for about a year while there has been bickering back and forth between the new Conservative government and this Liberal government in Ontario. Finally, something is going to be spent. What's going to be spent is for a few new homes—and we were thankful for that. Thousands of people are going to get some kind of subsidy, and some of our First Nations people are going to get an opportunity for homes. But what isn't going to happen—what I don't see here is the crisis involving public housing in Ontario.

I had an opportunity and I know members of all three parties had an opportunity last year to spend a couple of nights in public housing. I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing spent at least one night in Moss Park. I had the opportunity of going for two nights to Jane-Finch. I had an opportunity to live in public housing as I had not done since I was a young man. I had an opportunity to go back and to remember, and to live again what it was like to live in public housing. I described in a speech when I came back what it was like to see the urine in the halls or to smell the urine in the halls, to see the cracked ceilings, to see the state of disrepair, to see the holes, to see people in despair, to see the bars on the windows and all those things that make public housing an anathema to people who don't really want to live there but have no choice. I looked to this budget to see if there would be any relief.

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The city of Toronto has documented—and I believe with all of my heart that it's correct—that they need \$342

million to repair the sorry state of public housing in Toronto that was downloaded by the previous government, and every member opposite knows it's true. If you were a private landlord of those places, you'd be hauled before every tribunal in this city, every tribunal in this province, to make necessary repairs. Yet the province of Ontario, as the largest landlord, does not do so, and in this budget there's virtually nothing to do so. There is about \$100 million spread out across the entire province, being about \$25 million for Toronto, which is about 10% of what is needed to make that housing decent and affordable and a place where people would want to live.

I welcome the members opposite again, I invite the finance minister again, to go and live where poor people in Toronto, poor people in Ontario, live every single night and see the despair and see the children and see the youth who have nothing to do and see the circumstances in which they live. And then I question why this budget does nothing except pass on the federal largesse. It does nothing at all with our money, and I consider it to be a disgrace.

I want to leave at least a few minutes for my colleague. Again, I started off by saying that we are going to be voting on supply, and that's what the vote is going to be tonight. But as a person who held out so much hope when the previous government was defeated, so much hope that things would happen in the four years of the mandate of this government, four years later, I am standing here saying that virtually nothing has happened.

All we have in this budget is a promise that three years from now, there will be a \$10 minimum wage; seven years from now, there will be property tax reform; five years from now, there will be help for the clawback; 12 years from now, there will be help for the state of housing in the province of Ontario. Quite frankly, it is too little and too late. The minister asked for us to support that budget. If we supported that budget, we would be showing confidence in what this government is doing and, quite frankly, I don't have any.

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): I welcome the opportunity to spend a little time tonight speaking about some good things. Normally, I'm in the chair, captivated by the debate that's going on, and I don't get this kind of an opportunity, so I welcome it.

In this budget—a week ago, or last Thursday, I guess it was—it was an absolute delight for me to be able to call municipalities in my community who are going to benefit from the \$70-million rural infrastructure investment initiative.

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: It's \$140 million.

Mr. Crozier: Well, I'm telling you the good news from the first part of the budget, and then I'll get on to the good news even beyond that. I was able to phone a town like Amherstburg and say that in this budget there's \$1.6 million for their new water tower. I was able to phone the warden of the county of Essex and say that there's \$500,000 in this budget to fix the Pike Creek Bridge.

I was able, at the same time I was on the phone with the warden, who's the mayor of Kingsville, to say that

there's \$950,000 in this budget for some infrastructure improvement on the old Talbot Road, and then I was able to get hold of my good friend Tout, the mayor of Essex, and say, "You know what? That arena of yours that's in disrepair: This budget contains \$2.8 million to help you with that arena project."

So that's good news for rural Ontario. That was part of the \$70 million that was earmarked for this rural infrastructure investment initiative. In addition to that, in this budget we're going to double that. It's going to \$140 million to help rural Ontario. Do you know what? There are other things we have to do—and I think the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is going to speak in a few minutes. However, that takes pressure off not only the small rural communities that I represent but also the farm communities that surround them, because it certainly goes a way to minimizing, reducing their property tax that goes to this kind of infrastructure work that needs to be done.

It has also been my pleasure in the last year or so to work with and be successful at having family health teams established in Harrow and Amherstburg. Harrow is the community within a community. There was some amalgamation and the community of Harrow is now part of the municipality of Essex, but Harrow retains its spirit. Harrow retains that small-town spirit that those of us in rural Ontario appreciate—in fact, what keeps us in rural Ontario. Harrow went out and said, "Look, we need a family health team in this community. We understand that there are doctor shortages right across this country, but we want to do something in our own community to correct that. So this little community got together and raised all the capital funding needed to build their new family health team centre. They have two doctors and a nurse practitioner, and they have plans for other health caregivers to join in this family health team. I have always said that Harrow is a town with spirit, and that spirit continues to grow in that community. Our health minister, George Smitherman, through Finance Minister Sorbara, has been able to make this dream come true.

Amherstburg has recently been approved for a family health team. Again, it's going to support the care that needs to be given in a rural municipality that's outside the city of Windsor. The major hospitals in our area—there are two of them—are in Windsor. I'm probably one of the few members of this House who doesn't actually have a hospital in my riding. I think Carol Mitchell from Huron-Bruce said the other day she has eight hospitals in her riding. But my constituents either go to Leamington, which has an absolutely great small hospital in the area, or they go into the city of Windsor, but to help with that, there's even a satellite dialysis centre at the Leamington hospital.

Some really good things have been happening in rural Ontario. I'm quite proud to say that it has been our government in the last three years—and we continue. This budget is one that's going to take us through the next four years and beyond, and we have to plan well into the future. We can't do everything at once. I think

there are some good things that are happening in rural Ontario. There are certainly some good things that are happening in my riding.

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I just want to conclude with the fact that Harrow high school is open and thriving, a small community high school, a student population in the area of 300, but something that's vital to that community.

Finally, there's the Highway 3 bypass improvement: some safety improvements, widening to four lanes. The first stage will start this summer. In fact, a design is underway now. They've been out working on parts of the highway, clearing brush, getting ready to start an \$80-million project on Highway 3, to run from Leamington to the great new border crossing that we're going to have in the area of Windsor.

So rural Ontario has had some good things happening. I'm pleased that they're happening in my area, and I'll continue to work on those things that we need in rural Ontario.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): As we debate supply and concurrences this evening, I'd like to touch on two issues, really: less than adequate compensation for homeowners in the town of Caledonia and the lack of an announcement with respect to tobacco compensation.

With respect to tobacco, tobacco tax revenue across the Dominion of Canada comes in at something in the order of \$9 billion, if you include federal and the various provincial treasuries. We have a problem with counterfeit, contraband and illicit product, much of it distributed through native communities, and that subtracts \$1.5 billion a year in tobacco revenue. It's important to deal with this, to crack down on the illegal market, additional tax revenue accrued. We see this reflected in the recent budget. Ontario tobacco tax revenue in 2006-07 was \$1.26 billion, and this dropped to \$1.21 billion projected for 2007-08. That's in the context of never-ending tobacco tax increases.

These cheap sources of tobacco undermine the sin-tax strategy of government, and hence we see so many young people continuing to smoke.

There is an unintended partnership of government policy and organized crime. It has put Canadian tobacco farmers and the legal tobacco trade at a competitive disadvantage. Nowhere is this more evident than in Brant county, Oxford, Norfolk and Elgin. I worked in tobacco a number of years ago. There were well over 3,000 farmers. Now we're looking at about 600 active farmers, another 600 quota holders.

Worsening the situation is the fact that legal manufacturing and retail of tobacco continues to suffer at the hands of the illegal production and the smoke shops.

Tobacco is not like any other crop—I know the Minister of Agriculture is here this evening—but it's also driven by policy from finance—I think the Minister of Finance has just left—health and justice.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask you not to make reference to the absence of any member of the House in the context of your remarks.

Mr. Barrett: Police, other law enforcement agencies, health groups and anti-smoking advocates—actually, the Minister of Finance is in the House—concede that the sale and consumption of illicit cigarettes now account for something like 25% to 30% of sales. Hence, manufacturers import product to compete with the illegal market. We have to deal with organized crime. We have to deal with and remove demand for the illegal product, enforce the laws and recoup some of this lost \$1.5 billion in tax revenue.

Both the marketing board and Tobacco Farmers in Crisis have presented an exit proposal to federal agriculture minister Chuck Strahl and provincial agriculture minister Leona Dombrowsky. Minister Dombrowsky has indicated her willingness to discuss a solution: "Ontario will be an active participant." I'm not sure just what the minister means by this phrase "active participant."

The Premier would attribute the drop in tax revenues to Smoke-Free Ontario. That's a drop even with the jacking up of tobacco taxes. Much of this loss of revenue is because of the tax-free black market. These are Ontario tobacco growers, and if this crisis were in any other province, they would certainly be taken under the government's wing. This Ontario government did declare war. All we're asking for is war reparations, essentially. We're looking for action on a plan from the Ontario government and, very simply, funding for compensation.

Tory was recently quoted, "Ontario doesn't need to wait for Ottawa to help tobacco farmers. The province has hiked tobacco taxes several times and pocketed the cash instead of helping farmers with it." As I've indicated, the tax money is there. Even though it has declined somewhat, Ontario still rakes in well over \$1 billion a year in tobacco taxes. We've recently seen a budget that came in at \$91 billion. We know there's a surplus: something in the order of well over \$300 million. I do encourage tobacco farm families, I encourage tobacco growers, I encourage mayors and municipal councillors throughout tobacco country to come to Queen's Park, to lobby, in particular during the final days of this fiscal year. It's very important to fight for an exit strategy. We know of the surplus monies. They could be delivered to tobacco country if this particular government had the political will. A few years back, \$20 million was acquired at about this time in the fiscal year, at the very end, to finance the kiln conversion.

I do not intend to give up fighting at this 11th hour. We need fair treatment for our growers, and it's time now for this Ontario government to step up to the plate, with or without the federal government. The clock is ticking, and I fear that if farmers don't receive some good news soon, then desperate times will truly call for some desperate measures.

The second issue that I mention, Caledonia: A complete lack of leadership seen with respect to the Caledonia Six Nations. There appears to be a weakness

in the political system's ability to resolve aboriginal land claim issues. Very clearly, in my view, land claims are a federal responsibility. The province is responsible for roads, policing, land deeds.

As of last June, Dalton McGuinty—and I see the Minister of Municipal Affairs is here this evening; in fact, it was Minister Gerretsen who promised to compensate Caledonia homeowners affected by the occupation, people—

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: They got their cheques this week.

Mr. Barrett: The minister has just interjected that people got their cheques this week. In fact, Minister, there's a meeting this Sunday night, April 1. I would invite you to come to that meeting. They do want to discuss those cheques that were announced. You say they've been delivered. I know not everyone is accepting those cheques. Maybe I'll see you April 1. If not, I can bring regrets on your behalf.

Over the past year we've seen some confusion. We've seen some overlapping responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments. Don't use that as an excuse to finger-point or blame other counterparts.

I think back to March 1 last year. I spoke with Minister Ramsay when I first heard of the occupation. I was told at that time—we looked at the briefing books—that it's a federal matter. Two days later, I wrote to the federal Minister of Indian Affairs regarding the occupation. A few weeks later, on behalf of the clan mothers, I delivered documents to Ottawa to the Governor General. Again, at that point, the McGuinty line: federal concern. April 12, a big change: indicated it's a provincial matter. Since then, we have seen the responsibility ping-pong back and forth.

More recently, and this is what is problematic, we have seen this pathetic announcement with respect to the compensation package offered to Caledonia residents. Some residents, if they took that cheque, would be receiving something to the equivalent of one day's pay for Liberal crony Jane Stewart. We've seen some flip-flops. We remember the failed response with respect to road closures. The Premier broke his promise to halt negotiations until the rule of law is respected. More recently, we have seen the pathetic, weak-kneed follow-through on the compensation announcement that was made by Minister Gerretsen on June 16.

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Spring is coming; that exposed Haldimand clay on Douglas Creek Estates will be drying up rapidly. This will enable a lot more movement on that occupied site. I am fearful, given the McGuinty government's willingness to tolerate the lawlessness, that we will be seeing more conflict, a very real spectre of more property damage and—my concern—a very real spectre of personal injury.

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I want to thank my colleague Michael Prue, who is helping me keep my papers organized here, because they tend to be falling off these slanted desks.

It's an interim supply motion tonight, and we know that's not necessarily about the budget, but of course it is, in a way, because it allows the government to have the opportunity to make expenditures over the next little while before everything is finalized in terms of the budget actually being passed by this Legislature. So really what we do is take an opportunity in debates like this to talk a little bit about the budget and anything else, really, that is of concern or significance to the people of Ontario from the perspective of the members who sit in this Legislature, who were sent here by the people of Ontario to represent their interests. So it's extremely important, and in fact is incumbent upon me as a member from the city of Hamilton, to reflect upon the extent to which the budget did or did not make much of a difference for Hamiltonians overall.

I have to say first and foremost that the biggest disappointment, for the people of Hamilton, anyway, was the fact that this government very specifically chose to give the city of Hamilton a bit of a backhand when it came to their downloading problems. I say that because we know very well that, year after year, the city of Hamilton has come cap in hand to this Legislature asking, requesting, beseeching the government to help out with the fact that the downloading that had occurred under the previous government had caused a revenue inequality or unneutrality—I don't know what the word is. The government of the day called it a revenue-neutral project or a revenue-neutral exercise, but at the municipal level we found out quickly that it was far from revenue-neutral.

The city of Hamilton did some work in trying to figure out what that lack of funding meant in terms of real dollars. I think initially it was something like, if I can recall from my days on council, \$38 million. Some of that was reduced by what was at the time called the community reinvestment fund, which has now morphed into something else altogether, neither of which had anything real in terms of an impact on reducing that deficit, if you will. So the city of Hamilton has spent every year for the last several years coming up with a figure that in some way reflects the philosophical issue around the fact that certain services—I'm not going to talk about some of the broader services, but certain services, from our gut, do not belong on the property tax base. Of course, those are income redistribution services or, if you will, colloquially, social services.

They don't even come here and ask for the entire \$30 million that is the balance that is owed from the downloading exercise; they come asking for just the social services portion, because everybody knows that social services don't belong on the property tax base. Every year, the government opens up the purse a little bit and gives them a little bit of money and pats them on the head and sends them away. But I have to tell you, the people of Hamilton are absolutely fed up with the fact that, over the term of the government—they have chosen, in fact, not to fix the problem in a systemic way.

The government members, particularly the ones from Hamilton, like to pat themselves on the back and say, "Oh yes, but we answer your call every year," but they're only answering a portion of the call, because the big part of the call that they're not answering is the fact that we need a permanent solution so that that city knows every year what to expect in terms of their social services costs and having it off of the responsibility of the property taxpayer.

I have got to tell you, I was pretty surprised, because my colleagues around our table sometimes say, "People don't really get what downloading means." I can tell you, the people of Hamilton get it, and they got it; they got it like a knife in their back from this government with this budget because they refused, once again, to deal with this problem in a systemic way.

This very past weekend I was out with my partner. We were looking at shrubs for our garden, and lo and behold, at the garden centre a woman approached me and the first thing she said to me was something to the effect that this government just doesn't get it. She said to me, "What is wrong with them? They just don't understand. Do they know how high my property taxes are? Do they know how burdensome it is that they're not dealing with this ongoing issue?" All I could say to this woman was, "Yes, I think they know. We've told them loud and clear, but they choose to ignore us." They really don't care. They're more interested in York and Peel and Halton, and they're happy to make those well-off communities whole. But for us in Hamilton, we just have to be moving along and not even getting any consideration whatsoever.

There are a number of articles that came out in our news media, a number of things that came forward. One of the first ones that was put on the wire was that the finance director of the city of Hamilton, Joe Rinaldo, said that \$5 million less than the city had been asking for was provided, and it could translate into a property tax hike of 5% per year.

So it wasn't just a sense that people had; it was a knowledge and understanding of the way this government has been shafting the city of Hamilton over the last several years in terms of a permanent solution. The residents know it, and the treasurer of the city of Hamilton was very blunt in his criticism of this budget. People were shocked to learn that the city of Hamilton was once again ignored.

I received an e-mail from somebody in my riding, and here's what he had to say:

"I wanted to let you know how extremely disappointed I am at the absolute lack of consideration for social services downloading that this latest budget has for the citizens of Hamilton. We are overtaxed and cannot afford to fund this transfer disparity any longer. Please advise on your position with respect to this issue," and it goes on to say how disgraced he feels about how Hamilton has been treated by the province. "Voters in Hamilton will respond accordingly to this issue in the fall election as the Liberal government appears to view maintaining or increasing Hamilton's seats as unimportant. Clearly we

need to organize in Hamilton to send a message to this government this fall. We need action and representation on this issue immediately." It was signed "with extreme disappointment" by my constituent Robb.

So clearly, it's not just a matter of the treasurer; it's a matter of everyday people in the community of Hamilton, people who are extremely fed up with the lack of representation by the mega Liberal voices that hold seats in this very Legislature. Every single one of them should be ashamed of trying to sell this budget down the throats of the people of Hamilton, who are much more sophisticated and get it in ways that I'm sure some of those members who are sitting here from that community don't even get. To pretend that it was a fair deal is really a disgrace to all of us.

Here's another article that was in our Hamilton Spectator:

"'We've been treated abysmally by the province,' said councillor Brad Clark," which everybody kind of chuckles at a little bit. "'(We) have to play hardball because they're doing it to us.'

"Council endorsed his tactic to publicly target the province for the shortfall. For example, Clark pictures traffic median signs saying 'Flowers cancelled by Mr. McGuinty'"—in other words, visual representations of what this community can no longer afford to do to make it a positive and good place to live because they have to take the money out of their budget and fund social services and downloaded costs that should be paid for at the provincial level. It's an absolute disgrace.

"Councillors also agreed to withhold money collected for the province. But that simply means it will be deducted from payments to Hamilton.

"Residents are facing a 5% tax" increase, and I could go on in terms of this particular article.

"While staff reported Hamilton fared poorly in the budget," the mayor had some other things to say, for which he got the smackdown from his councillors as a result.

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Here's another one:

"Reaction to the province's so-called poverty budget from poverty advocates"—okay, so now we know that regular citizens as well as councillors, as well as the treasurer of the city of Hamilton, have all said that this is not good enough. In fact, it's an insult, and they're quite fed up with the fact that the provincial government refuses to take Hamilton seriously. Our regular citizens, as well as councillors, are suggesting that the Liberals had better watch it in the fall election if they continue in this disregard for our community.

Not only that, but we know that Hamilton has equal the poverty rate of the city of Toronto. The minister responsible for children and youth said it again today in her statement on their child benefit that they've announced. I've got to say, it's pathetic.

Here's what poverty activists in Hamilton, with one of the highest rates in this province—equal to Toronto—are

saying about the pathetic nature of this government's budget:

"Reaction to the province's so-called poverty budget from poverty advocates" in Hamilton, "low-income families and researchers ranged from the disdainful to the lukewarm.

"Poverty budget? I think it's a poverty budget because it's going to keep people in poverty," said a clearly unimpressed Kelly Hayes," an advocate "who helped organize income security and living wage campaigns. Hayes was angry that the province will be taking three years to raise the minimum wage to the \$10 mark."

Here's another one:

"Rev. Wendy Roy, of St. Matthews House"—another food bank and anti-poverty grassroots organization that helps people day in and day out on the streets of Hamilton—said, "I don't think single people in particular and others are gaining much at all—it's one step forward and four steps backward."

That's what people on the ground—not the Toronto Star, maybe, but people who know what's going on in terms of the real poverty that exists in real neighbourhoods in community after community, particularly places like the city of Toronto and places like the city of Hamilton, are saying. They're saying that it is a sad, sad reflection.

In the minister's remarks when he was speaking earlier tonight, I've got to say I was pretty shocked when he was referring to how poverty is hidden and how you really don't see it and how you really have to look. You know what? Open your eyes and look on any street in Hamilton centre and Hamilton East and you'll find poverty right up close and personal. It ain't pretty and it ain't getting solved by this measly budget that has been put forward.

"Craig Foye, a poverty lawyer and member of the Income Security Working Group," said about the budget that "the elephant in the room is the adequacy of social assistance rates. What we really need is an intelligent social assistance rate based on actual costs."

The budget was a farce, it's not going to do anything for Hamilton and it's going to keep people in this province living in poverty for another five to seven years. Unacceptable.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I'm happy to stand in the House this evening. We are talking about the supply bill this evening. As has already been explained by a number of our colleagues here this evening, it is an opportunity—when we talk about supply, we talk about monies that have been set aside to do the business of the province, and that does tie this debate to an extent to the budget that was put forward a week ago by my colleague the Minister of Finance.

It gives me an opportunity to talk about the impact of the budget in rural Ontario, for farmers in Ontario.

Mr. Leal: Good news for farmers.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: It has been good news for farmers. Actually, our government has been good news

for farmers; in addition to the fact that the planned spending at my ministry this year will increase over what we spent last year—as has been the case.

Interjections.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I'm so happy that there are members of the opposition here this evening because I'm sure that they would be very interested to know that OMAFRA's spending, the amount of money that is planned to be spent in my ministry for the next fiscal year, is 28% higher than the previous government's actual spending in the last year it was in government. That's quite significant. If you look at our four years in government and our planned spending, we've spent 19% more in four years than the previous government spent in eight years.

What people in rural Ontario want to know, what farmers want to know, is: "What does that mean for me? Where are the investments in agriculture for me?" Well, specifically we have new spending in the area of the Ontario BioAuto Council. We have set aside \$6 million for the Ontario BioAuto Council. This is an initiative that has come to us through the advice of farmers. They've indicated that this would be a very important investment.

We are also setting aside \$2.5 million to support our agrifood partners as they have worked to develop their own marketing and branding strategies for the products, the very fine-quality food products that they produce. To build on that, our government has committed an additional \$10 million to our marketing and branding strategy. So we will be working hand in glove with the agri-food industry to promote Ontario food products. That's going to be good news for Ontario farmers, good news for Ontario rural communities and good news for Ontarians, because they will understand why it is in their better interest to prefer Ontario products.

I live in rural Ontario. There were a number of items in the budget that I believe had a very positive impact for communities in my riding—investments with respect to rural infrastructure. Our Premier had indicated that it would be our plan to spend \$70 million to improve rural infrastructure that had been neglected by the previous government. We doubled that. We doubled that commitment to spend \$70 million. We will be spending \$140 million in rural communities right across Ontario.

I have to say that on the day of the budget, did they appreciate it. I must say that I contacted some of the municipal leaders in my riding the day of the budget.

Mr. Leal: Overjoyed.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: They were absolutely overjoyed; they were over the moon. This meant so much to, in many cases, very small rural communities. They're going to have their bridge repaired. They're going to have sewage systems upgraded. These were really very, very important investments.

Municipal folks whom I spoke to were also very, very happy with the business education tax announcement. There are a number of municipalities in my riding who were of the mind—and I think that the numbers demonstrated that they were not equitably treated with respect

to business education tax. That is something we are going to deal with.

Of course, the Ontario child tax benefit will help children right across Ontario, including children in my riding and certainly throughout rural communities.

I wish I had more time. I'm sharing my time this evening with my colleagues. We think that it's very important that we enter into the debate some of the good work that the plan of this budget will achieve if passed.

I have other colleagues who are waiting to offer their ideas at this time, but it really is important, I think, that people in Ontario hear the good news that this budget means for the province.

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): It certainly is a pleasure for me to be able to take a few minutes of your time to talk about this budget, especially when we just heard that fairy tale from the Minister of Agriculture. She is a great one—I'm sure in her riding she must have written a lot of fairy tales for people, because this budget is a fairy-tale budget. If you're going to believe the budget, you'll believe anything.

They have the minister of ag and food stand here and tell us how wonderful it was after she cut over \$100 million out of the ag budget and she won't admit it. She, in her mind, thinks that she put money into it. I don't know who she's listening to, whether the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. people are dealing with her or who's dealing with her, but the scandals are so big with the Liberals that now they want to tell us things that aren't even true. There were over \$100 million cut this time, and then she had the audacity to blame the other government: "Oh, it's you guys. I've got more than you guys." Well, wah wah. That's really great that you've got more than us. I just never have seen a bunch that wants to blame everybody else for the silly things that they do.

That's fine if she wants to stand here and try to tell people, but nobody believes her out there—nobody. You would never want to admit that you're a Liberal and then tell somebody something. Nobody would believe you. You just couldn't believe it.

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That's why we're here tonight: to talk about the budget they've brought down. That's why we have to have these bills passed: because it deals with the budget, and that's why we're here. But we've heard some wild stories tonight. If people want to put their kids to bed, tune in, because you're going to hear some real fairy tales. Nobody's going to believe them anyway. This is the greatest thing: They say, "And people in my riding are so proud of us." We'll see what happens in the tent. We'll certainly see how proud of it they are.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Oh, yes, we will, Bill.

Mr. Murdoch: I've seen cocky people before in this House, and they're not here anymore. We've seen a whole bunch of them over there, and there'll be room for them to sit over on this side. I'm sure that the few of them who are left will have a little spot over here to be able to sit.

Anyway, they brag about it, and they've spent over 20 billion more dollars from when they got elected till now, and we haven't got anything. People are still upset. It took them four years to balance a budget; can you believe that? "I will balance every budget"—I remember McGuinty saying that—and "I won't raise your taxes." Just think of the things they told us.

Mr. Leal: Look at what Janet Ecker did. She balanced the budget too.

Mr. Murdoch: Now it's Janet Ecker's fault, and she's not even here. Can you believe that? These guys would blame anybody just to say that they were right. I have never seen such a bunch in my life, and I've been here for 17 years. The NDP never blamed everybody like that. Certainly for a couple of years we might have, but four years after they're in government, they're still blaming the opposition for their incompetence. I guess that's what you can do if you can't get things right: "Let's blame the other guys." Do you know those three envelopes? They'd better get out the third envelope, because they'll be giving it to the next Premier, that's for sure—and it won't be a Liberal. There's just no way.

To be able to stand over there and look at people and say, "I raised your budget"—I can't believe the Minister of Agriculture can even do that to the people out there. The people out there said, "What kind of a world is that lady coming from?"

That's just one of the things. I want to talk more about the homes for the aged, which they totally forgot about. They're over there bragging about all the money they put into it. What happens for the homes for the aged? They didn't do anything.

Let's read here. Homes for the aged have sent us all kinds of petitions in this House. It says:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need...." They didn't give them anything. That's where it starts out. Then it says:

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations...." They did absolutely nothing for these people, the people who made this country, the people who made Ontario the best place there is to live in the world. Then we get four years of these Liberals and they put us down to last place again across Canada—and they don't want to look after these people. You would think they might have had some compassion to look after the people who are in these homes, but no: "We don't want to give them anything." Then to stand up and say, "We give money here; we give money there," and you look at the budget and they didn't do that. You wonder where these people are coming from. It's so unfortunate that Ontario had to put up with them for four years. But as you know, something will change.

Another thing: They say, "Whereas dietary, house-keeping and other services that residents and their

families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs...." Again, there's no money for them. They failed to look after the people in our society who need this kind of care.

Another: "Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes"—this is after this government kept bragging about the money they've put out to help the homes—"many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms...." Again, where did we see anything in the budget for that? There was not a thing to help out the homes. I notice they've gone pretty quiet about that because they know they haven't. The Minister of Finance, I guess, doesn't care about these people. It's really unfortunate that the Liberals—

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: Oh, come on, Bill.

Mr. Murdoch: There we hear the Minister of Municipal Affairs: "Oh, come on, Bill." I can't help it. It was your budget, not mine. You'd like to blame it on us. It was your unfortunate budget that didn't give these people any money to look after them. They've been crying for help out there, and you people totally ignored them; you ignored the homes for the aged.

Another: "Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes"—we passed that in here and, of course, what happened? The Liberals ignored it. That was one of their promises: "We will honour the backbenchers of all three parties. We will listen to them. We will do things." So we get in this House; we pass a resolution. It's passed. There must have been some Liberals who voted for it to pass, and they ignored it totally in this budget. Their last budget, and they ignored it. What did they think—it doesn't matter about these people out there in society? It doesn't matter if we look after them? Obviously, something is wrong with them. Then they turn around and blame it on the other governments. That is a big joke.

Then they've got rot within their own party now. They've got a scandal going on over there with the OLG, the biggest scandal. But of course, it's Liberals. Liberals are used to scandals, aren't they? The member in front of me will agree to that. They had the scandal of the month up in Ottawa. Now it's the same Liberals down here getting into another scandal. Isn't that something? These Liberals—

Mr. Barrett: Patti Starr.

Mr. Murdoch: They had Patti Starr, but that's going back. We can't blame these guys for her.

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: The Treasurer might have been around in those days. I'm sure he was. He probably got a couple of fridges from her; I'm sure he did. But we won't blame that on them.

We have a new scandal going on over there in the OLG. Millions of dollars are being siphoned off, and by whom? We don't know. They don't want to do an inquiry into it, because look what happened in Ottawa when they did an inquiry on the Liberals. They found out: "Hey,

those guys up there weren't too good a people. They were scamming money from the people." We don't know whether that's happened, but they're certainly afraid of finding out. They certainly are afraid. "Hey, maybe we're scamming a little money here, and the election is coming and we wouldn't want that to happen."

But I digress.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound to be careful with his language, and I would ask him to withdraw that particular unparliamentary remark.

Mr. Murdoch: "Scamming money"? I didn't say they were, Mr. Speaker, but if you'd like me to withdraw it, I will withdraw that.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Murdoch: We don't know what they were doing with the money. We have no idea where that money was going because they don't want to look at it. So maybe something was wrong. People out there are looking and wondering. People out there in television land are saying, "Hey, are these the same Liberals who were in Ottawa, the same bunch only they're down here now?" We don't know. We have no idea what these guys are up to, and they don't want to find out. They don't want to find out. They're certainly afraid of opening it up because, hey, something might be wrong there.

Let's get back to the homes for the aged. They don't want to help. All those millions of dollars that have gone somewhere and could have gone into helping homes for the aged—they could have done that. We understand there's over \$100 million. That's what Trillium gets. Trillium gets \$100 million. What do you think another \$100 million in Trillium would have done to help people out there? But, hey, we don't know where that went, and we're not liable to find out because these guys over here don't want to do anything about it. They're afraid to open the books, because we know what happened in Ottawa to the Liberals. What's going to happen to the Liberals in Toronto? We're not sure what these Liberals down here are up to, and, boy, they're trying to keep it pretty close. But they may have to open up the books. I know the media love you guys because you're giving them all kinds of things to write about—another scandal.

They're so cocky over there. "We don't have to resign because we're so good. Everybody believes us." That's another one: "Everybody believes us." But if they had any credibility they would resign, open it up, and see what's happened. But no, they're going to stay around; they're going to try to fight it out. We'll see what happens there.

Another thing that's not happening with our homes and that they asked for—they said, "Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act...." Who knows what these guys are up to? Do they have some homes out there they want to look at for themselves? Maybe that's where some of them should be. I'm not sure.

I have a bunch here, and I have tons more in here, and everybody every day is reading these petitions in the House which deal with the budget that they didn't want to deal with. It said:

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million...." How much did they have for a surplus? Around that figure. Maybe you could have done that, but they want that surplus as a little bit of a slush fund. That little bit of a slush fund must be going to help you out somewhere, and maybe you might put it back into ag and food—you took \$100 million out of ag and food; or the Ministry of Natural Resources: \$36 million out of them. We don't have any money there for them now. They have to put cookie raffles on to put gas in their cars so they can go out—

Interjection.

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Mr. Murdoch: Do I hear something? Do I hear something in the House? Do I hear somebody over there? Is there somebody really awake over there? Because we think you were a little bit asleep over there when the OLG happened. Now maybe they woke up. Do we hear another little voice? Can we hear that again? No, it has gone silent again.

Anyway, "\$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care." That's all they wanted, 30 minutes, and they got a minute. This would have fit in their scheme, because it was in 2008. Their budget goes up to, what, 2015? They figure they're going to be around that long to implement some of this stuff. Well, I'm telling you, you're not going to be here to do this. As I say, it was a fairy-tale budget that I don't believe anybody even believes in anymore, because we can go back to all those promises they made and all those promises they were going to do—they can't keep their promises. This is a government—

Interjection.

Mr. Murdoch: Now we promised again. It's our fault again. Now they're going to blame us again. I've been here for a long time. I've never heard a bunch who wants to blame somebody else all the time, always saying, "It's your fault, not our fault. Just because we're incompetent and can't do things right, it's not our fault." They are the worst I've seen, and this budget just sort of shows you. As I say, all kinds of promises are in there, and they're all over the map on it. Then to stand over there and say, "We put money in," in places they didn't put money—that's pretty cocky, I have to say.

I guess we just have to put up with it for a little bit longer. I'm certainly glad I had this chance. I didn't know I'd hear from them over there this long. But it's really unfortunate that the homes for the aged didn't receive the money that they deserve. This government certainly let them down big time, and who knows why? All those other promises they made for more housing—the federal government gave them some money to do it and they still didn't know how to handle that: "What are we going to do? We've got this money and we're

supposed to build houses, but our expertise is gone. We had no idea. It must be the other guy's fault. Maybe we'll blame the other guys that we didn't build some houses. Maybe we'll blame them that we didn't do that and we didn't do this." Again, as I say, it took them four years to finally balance a budget they thought they could balance right away; then they blame somebody else. It will be fun in the next election to hear the Liberals go out and blame it all on the other guys and make all these new promises that they want to live with. It will be great.

It's nice to have been able to be here and to say a few words.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: Thank you for giving me just a few opportunities to express my opinion about this great budget, especially for the low-income people in our province. But I can't let my good friend opposite, who I know also was a municipal councillor and reeve at one time—of his own government members who are still sitting in his caucus right now, he once said about one of those individuals that he was the worst minister he had ever seen. Those aren't my words and I will not name that particular individual, who is still a member of his caucus. For him to attack us on that kind of a score I think is totally out of line.

Let me just very quickly deal with some facts. First of all, let's deal with the agricultural budget. You may recall that he said we're spending less in agriculture. All he has to do is look at page 166 of our budget book, where it clearly indicates that last year we spent \$809 million in agriculture and food; this year we will be spending \$876 million in agriculture and food, which is an increase right there of about \$67 million. That, of course, is not everything, because what quite often happens during the year, in many, many of the various ministries, is that, because of unusual circumstances, extra money will be allocated to a particular ministry, as has happened in agriculture a number of times over the last number of years. That's exactly why we have the \$1-billion reserve or contingency fund: in order to deal with those kinds of situations. He knows that we're spending a lot more money in agriculture and food than we have this past year.

I always find it fascinating when a Conservative member stands up and says that we're not spending money here, there and everywhere. The reality of the situation is that over the last four budgets, going right back to when we first formed government, the expenditures of this province have gone from \$73 billion to \$91 billion—that's an increase of \$18 billion—with most of the money being spent in extra health care costs, which we all know are needed. We live in an aging society, and we want to make sure that we have the best health care possible available for the people of this province. In education, over \$3.5 billion of additional money has gone into primary and secondary education alone, to make sure that our children have the best possible opportunity in life.

The question that I have of the Conservative caucus is a very simple one. We know that they're for tax cuts and

they're for giving money back to people. Wouldn't we all love to do that? But how are you going to do that when the expenditures of this province have gone up by \$18 billion in much-needed areas that everybody feels are the right places to do it, to look after our health care, education and the other needed programs? What are they going to cut out? That's what I'd like to know. I'd like to know that from Mr. Tory and from all the other Conservative members. It's wonderful to stand up on your feet each and every day and say, "Spend it here, spend it there and spend it everywhere," but what are you actually going to cut if you're going to tell the people of Ontario that you're going to give them some of their tax dollars back?

Now, let me just talk about one other thing that I'm very proud of, and that is our housing program this year. Our housing program will contribute \$100 per month to low-income earners, up to \$20,000, who have a child living with them, for 27,000 families in this province. That program will start later on this year. The NDP undoubtedly will vote against it because, according to them, it's not enough. Perhaps it isn't enough, and we wish we could do more, but it's a heck of a good start for 27,000 families who are in effect going to get \$1,200 per year, who are spending too much of their money right now on rent. It will certainly allow those individuals to utilize the \$1,200, plus the extra child benefits that we are increasing as well to the tune of \$1,100 per child within the next three years, starting off at \$250 come July 1 of this year. That means that low-income earners in this province who are making \$20,000 per year and have at least one child living at home will be getting \$2,000 to \$3,000 more per year, which they deserve, which they need to live on, and I think that's a darn good program. I know that the NDP would love to do more, and I have no idea where they would get the money. For them, whatever we do, it's never enough.

But that isn't the only thing we're doing. We are taking another \$127 million and handing it over to the housing service managers around this province in order for them to determine, together with the municipal councils that they report to, where to put the housing money for their communities. It may go to shelters; it may go to building new affordable housing; it may go into other supplement programs like the ones that we've started provincially here. We believe that municipalities are a mature level of government and that they're in the best position to determine where that money should go in their individual municipalities. At the end of the day, we will have delivered on what we promised to deliver in October 2003 when we said that by the end of our term we're going to build, or make money available to build, 20,000 new units of affordable housing across this province and a housing allowance available for 35,000 families as well. We're going to live up to that commitment. We think it's the right thing to do, and we urge the NDP in particular—because I know that there's absolutely no hope for our Tory friends over there—to take a look at this budget and to do the right thing and pass this

budget for the lower-income people in our province who are really benefiting from this budget.

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Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I'm pleased to join this debate and follow the thin-skinned and very sensitive group of people from the other side of the House. They seem to be very, very worried about the criticism that has been levelled at them this evening. When you're on that side of the House, you've got to accept that when you mess up, people are going to point it out to you, and all across the province, people have been doing just that since the tabling of the budget this past Thursday.

There are so many issues we could be speaking on in the budget. I want to start by putting on my glasses. I was listening to the Minister of Agriculture, and earlier I listened to the member from Peterborough. Actually, while I was listening to the Minister of Agriculture, I could hear the member from Peterborough, because he was doing his job as the dutiful parliamentary assistant to—I think he's environment, maybe. I keep track of you, Jeff. He was encouraging the minister and telling her how wonderful she is and what a wonderful job she has done. But the people in the agricultural community don't agree with you. They're not very happy.

Interjection.

Mr. Yakabuski: I hear the member from Perth–Middlesex saying they're happy there in Middlesex, but we hear differently. Quite frankly, I think a lot of those members from places like Perth–Middlesex and Peterborough and Northumberland should be very concerned. They should be very concerned because the people in rural Ontario are not very happy. They believe that maybe the Premier feels those members and their seats are expendable in order to win that vote-rich area surrounding the city of Toronto.

Anyway, if we look at the agricultural budget, the Ministry of Agriculture, he wants to talk about an increase going back to 2003 and 2004. Well, you know what? Since 2003 and 2004, most things have increased. The price of gas has gone up. That's four years ago. That's when these people came into office. Let's look at year to year. From year to year, depending on what happens with regard to the matching of federal funds, the agricultural budget could be dropping anywhere from just over \$100 million to \$90 million under the watch of this minister and this government. We don't want to hear about what Ron Bonnett thinks of it, as the member from Peterborough was talking about earlier. We want to hear what the current hierarchy of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture thinks of the support from this government for agriculture.

I want to shift gears just a little bit. We know that this is a supply motion, and we do have a certain amount of latitude. One thing I wanted to talk about is money being spent, because it comes down to: Where is money being spent? It was just amazing to hear that this government, under the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., which now is just—they took out the "C." Let me read this, because

we want to get it exactly right. They spent \$629,600 in legal costs fighting a senior citizen, Bob Edmonds—here it says he's 78 years old; I'm not sure if that's his current age—who was swindled out of a ticket. They paid literally over \$600,000 to fight this man in court. At the end of the day, they settled and paid him \$200,000. They paid him \$200,000 because he was swindled out of a \$250,000 ticket, but spent over \$600,000 fighting him in court. You know what that says about this government, what it says about the minister, who, quite frankly, has been abysmal in response to the criticism levelled at him? What it says about them is that the only principle that matters is winning at the end of the day. They were willing to spend 600,000-and-some dollars to fight this man in court, hoping that a senior citizen of nearly 80 years old who had already been wronged egregiously was going to throw in the towel and give up. But you know what? Bob Edmonds didn't give up. Good for you, Mr. Edmonds. I'm sure a lot of people, everybody across this province, says, "Good for you."

What about the minister? What about David Caplan, the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the man responsible for the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.? He tells us in this House that he knew nothing of the investigation—knew nothing about it. Yet we know that the Globe and Mail knows the truth; we know that all of you folks over there know the truth; and I really do believe that the people in Ontario know the truth. What I am wondering is: When are we going to hear the truth from the minister? When is he going to stand up and do the responsible thing, the honourable thing, and stand there as a man in the Queen's government and say, "I'm going to step aside until this terrible cloud that shrouds the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. is either lifted—and get to the bottom of it, but in the meantime, so that everyone involved can carry on a fair, impartial, non-partisan investigation, I'm going to step aside"? That's what would be the honourable thing.

Mr. Leal: The OPP are investigating, John.

Mr. Yakabuski: The member for Peterborough says, "The OPP are investigating." Do you know what the minister said? He wants the OPP to investigate the OLG. But who's investigating the conduct of the minister? That's what the people of Ontario want to know. Who's investigating the conduct of the minister? That's what the concern of the people across this province is.

Just as this government spent over \$600,000 to defend themselves against the senior citizen in court, God only knows how much they will spend, how much they will stonewall, how much they will deny, how much they will—I can't use the word, but it rhymes with "deny"—to keep the hounds at bay, so that the people won't get to the bottom of this, because, you see, we're in an election year, and this government is going to stop at nothing. They're going to do everything they can to prevent Minister Caplan from resigning. It doesn't really matter if it's the honourable thing or if it is representative of the truth. That's what they're going to do: They're going to do everything they can to protect him because they don't

want to go into this campaign with the baggage of a shamed minister.

How much of this budget will we spend to defend the minister under these circumstances? That is a question I think the people of Ontario would like to get an answer to. What kind of a surplus might we have if he just resigned and we put that money to good use? Maybe we could take some of that \$100 million that has been swindled out of the people of Ontario—maybe that could have gone to some good grants. The Trillium Foundation, of course, is funded through gaming receipts. Maybe we could have had some more money for that—maybe some good projects in my riding. Maybe we could even have helped the good member from Peterborough.

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I know that I've slid a wee bit off the topic of supply, but I felt that it was quite important to do so this evening.

Now I want to talk about some of the things that my good friend from Peterborough—he's very nervous. Peterborough is a bellwether riding, and he's nervous. I don't blame him; he's a nice guy. But at the same time, his Premier is not really helping him. You know what his Premier is doing? His Premier is doing his best impersonation of a groundhog, because, you see, it has gotten tough here in the last couple of days so the Premier has run away and hidden and retreated to some kind of a burrow because we haven't seen him. I don't know if we're going to see the Premier tomorrow; I don't know if we're going to see him Thursday. But as the Premier of Ontario, when your government tables a budget, it would be nice to be seen in the Legislature to show the people that you're actually there governing the province.

There's the other thing. I'm curious: Perhaps the Premier is, in a way, sending a bit of a message to his Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Perhaps the Premier is saying, "Look, I think that at some time over the next few days we're going to have to cut you loose. I can't be seen in the House defending you because, good Lord, when we actually do throw you to the wolves, I don't want to have been there defending you." Is that going to happen? I don't know. So the question is, will we see the Premier here to defend the minister? Will we see the Premier here to defend this budget that kicks the hell out of rural Ontario?

My good friends from Perth—Middlesex and Peterborough were talking earlier. My friend from Peterborough mentioned a good friend of mine: Bob Sweet, the former chair of Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus—

Mr. Leal: He's going to cut the ribbon on that new bridge in Arnprior.

Mr. Yakabuski: He's not the warden in Renfrew county anymore. You're going to have to keep on top of those things, Jeff.

He was saying how Bob was appreciative when there was a move to move slowly but incrementally to upload some of the land ambulance costs. And he was, and we very much appreciate it. But I had a conversation with Mr. Sweet last week, and he certainly didn't see too much in this budget that was helpful to rural Ontario.

Where is the money? Where is the help that they've been lobbying on so long? He is the past chair of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, and you heard it from Doug Struthers this week: "Where is the money for the eastern Ontario prosperity fund? Where is the money for gas tax to support the public transportation systems in rural Ontario, which are our roads and streets? Where is the money?"

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I appreciate the little bit of time that's left. I know the hour is getting late, so I may not use all of the clock, in the interest of the hour.

There are a few things, though, that I'd like to comment on, just to bring us back a little bit to what we're talking about: this supply act. It's an important piece of legislation in and of itself, but it's also an opportunity for us to digress at the time we're doing a budget. The supply act itself does provide the government with certain authority that is necessary to ensure that the programs that have been set out actually get the legislative approval that is necessary. Although we digress during the debate, it is an important piece of legislation. Frankly, in the absence of that, this process that we engage in here would be somewhat meaningless if, in effect, we didn't ultimately authorize the expenditures necessary to operate the province of Ontario.

I've heard some interesting things during the course of this evening. I heard a fair amount about Hamilton, and not all of the perspectives are quite the same on Hamilton. I would like to just draw attention to the following—and I don't know Andrew Dreschel, who has a commentary Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the Hamilton Spectator, but he had some interesting things to say, so maybe it's a little different from some of what we've heard. I'm not going to read it all, but I would like to draw upon a few of the comments. I think it starts off with the headline, "Wah, Wah, Wah. How Soon We Forget."

"What a bunch of unappreciative bellyachers and cry-babies. Either that or the lead in their pants has migrated to their brains."

"That's what I'd be thinking if I were a Liberal listening to city councillors whining about how badly Hamilton was treated in the provincial budget."

"There we were, expecting \$17 million to help cover the cost of downloaded social services and all we got from the McGuinty government was a measly \$12 million...."

"How soon we forget."

"It looks as if it's time for a lesson in recent history."

"This is the fourth year the city has asked the province for special social service funding, a request made in the name of fairness but now banked upon to stave off municipal service cuts and tamp down property tax increases...."

The refrain began in 2004, the demand for \$19.5 million, "and the province delivered every penny of it."

It goes on from there: "We gratefully viewed the money as windfalls and bailouts and were acutely aware Hamilton and Toronto were the only recipients in Ontario."

I think it's a recognition that Hamilton, like Toronto, has some special circumstances, but the reality is that the

province has continued and will continue, I suspect, to support municipalities such as the Hamiltons that find themselves in special-need situations.

I'd like to turn now to some of the things that are being said out there about the budget from those who are engaged at the community level, and we draw upon them for their expertise, for their knowledge, and seek from them input on what's happening in the province from their organizations and from their businesses. I'm just going to draw upon three or four, some of the folks that I've had the chance to run into over the past three years now and maybe on occasion before that, but more so during these past three years that I've participated here in this process.

Len Crispino, the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, says, "The reduction in BET rates is a major win for businesses in Ontario and will lead to increased productivity, job creation and output. Over 300 communities across this province will benefit from reduced industrial and commercial tax rates."

Judith Andrew—and I got to know Judith through some small-business agency work and through a task force I did for Minister Phillips early on—is the Ontario vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. On the same subject: "The big thing in the budget from our standpoint is the property tax relief; \$540 million applied to business education property tax relief is a real breakthrough from our standpoint. It's something we've been looking for for some time. Property tax relief is so important for small business ... it takes money before you can make profit, so the fact that businesses are so ill-treated under our current property tax system that we extract more money in property tax in this province than anyone else in Canada...." That's a pretty fair and balanced statement. It's a statement that we're doing the right thing and a statement that we still have much to do in this province to be as competitive as we want to be.

Mike Yorke, the vice-president of the Carpenters Union, Central Ontario Regional Council, speaking about training-related money and what we are trying to do on the training, college and university side: "The carpenters union strongly supports this initiative. The investment of \$25 million for upgrading and new technologies for union-employer training centres is the right investment for Ontario and sharpens our competitive edge in a globalized economy."

The last quote I'd like to draw upon is from someone I've had the opportunity to know for a number of years now. As a matter of fact, she was my predecessor here from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge and the former finance minister prior to leaving office.

Mr. Leal: Janet Ecker.

Mr. Arthurs: Janet Ecker, former Conservative finance minister and president of the Toronto Financial Services Alliance: "The capital tax is widely understood to scare off investment. By committing to legislation to eliminate the tax by 2010, the government will finally knock down this barrier to investment. We also welcome

the move to reduce business education taxes. These property taxes have added significantly to the cost of office space everywhere, but especially in Toronto, the country's capital for financial services head offices. These taxes have made us less competitive when trying to attract new investment to the city."

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So we have a variety of people serving in a variety of capacities—whether it's industry, union, financial services and those who have served in this Legislature—commenting from their perspective on the budget and on the initiatives taken. In each of those instances, those folks out there in Ontario who have a vested interest in the future of the health, well-being and prosperity of this province have spoken positively to key elements of this budget. I can think of no better statement than the statements of the likes of Len Crispino, Judith Andrew, Janet Ecker or Mike Yorke to speak to what we're doing as a government during this budget and to focus attention on the good things that are happening. For that I thank the minister, the consultations that went on—he was out there talking to 19 different consultations—the work we did as a standing committee in providing feedback and the work that his cabinet colleagues and caucus were able to input on for delivering a budget that serves the needs of the province of Ontario in an exceptional way as we head into this fall's election.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time. In the interest of being able to wrap up early, I'm going to cede any balance of time that we have.

The Acting Speaker: Any further debate?

Mr. Sorbara has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Sorbara has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Finance. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Mr. Sorbara has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Mr. Sorbara has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health Promotion. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Sorbara has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Mr. Sorbara has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Sorbara has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Mr. Sorbara has moved second reading of Bill 188, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

SUPPLY ACT, 2007

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2007

Mr. Sorbara moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 188, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2007 / Projet de loi 188, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2007.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day.

Hon. Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 2115.

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 28 March 2007

Mercredi 28 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 28 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 28 mars 2007

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PREMIER OF ONTARIO

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): Dalton McGuinty's poor decision-making is a threat to our principle of responsible government. This is a principle that goes back to 1848, during the era of parliamentarian Robert Baldwin. Cabinet ministers must take responsibility for any inability to properly oversee their departments.

We're seeing a disturbing pattern of behaviour with this government when it comes to holding cabinet ministers responsible for their actions, or lack thereof. Last year I spoke out against Premier McGuinty keeping then-transportation minister Takhar in cabinet after he broke the law. Under McGuinty's regime, nothing, absolutely nothing, is serious enough to warrant a cabinet minister to step aside.

Minister Caplan is under a dark cloud for what I now consider egregiously reckless behaviour and for his ducking and weaving on the lottery scandal. David Caplan is responsible for Lottogate and its \$100 million of stolen money. The buck should have stopped with him, and it didn't.

Minister Takhar broke the law and he sits in McGuinty's cabinet. Every day we are learning more about Minister Caplan's role in the \$100-million Lottogate, yet he's still sitting at the cabinet table. This begs the question: What must a Dalton McGuinty minister do to get fired? It's time for Dalton McGuinty to show some leadership and fire David Caplan.

GTA POOLING

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak about a very important issue in my riding of Thornhill, and that is the issue of GTA pooling. Since its inception by the previous Conservative government in 1998, municipalities in the region of York, Halton and Peel have been suffering under this tremendous financial burden. Since 1998, the region of York alone has paid \$744.8 million for GTA pooling. It's a huge amount. In fact, in 2006, the region of York alone

paid \$90.8 million, which amounted to 14% of the total budget for the year, second only to the spending of the police services board.

With the introduction of our budget, our government has announced a plan to phase out GTA pooling, and that is fair, because it was highly unfair for the previous Conservative government to impose on three regions surrounding Toronto the cost of social services, which quite frankly do not belong to the regions. This money that had been taken out of our regions unfortunately has caused significant problems for us in transportation and social services that are needed for our constituency. Again, I'm very pleased that the Liberals have made a change that was necessary.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I rise in the House today with a message for Ontario's Lottogate minister, David Caplan: Wake up and smell the coffee and read the press clippings. Maybe then you'll realize you're hanging on by a thread and you need to resign now.

The headline in today's Toronto Sun editorial by Christina Blizzard says it all: "Liberals Won't Face the Music: Caplan should take responsibility and McGuinty shouldn't run from the biggest scandal of his reign." Here are a few excerpts: "The big question is just what does it take for a Liberal cabinet minister to quit?" And, "I just don't know how you shame these Liberals into doing the right thing."

For those who might think the media favouring Caplan's resignation is confined to Toronto, think again. Today's Windsor Star doesn't mince words on the subject and ends, "Caplan must resign and a new minister must be appointed who cares more about cleaning up problems in Ontario's lottery system than ignoring them or covering them up."

David Caplan, it's time to come to terms with the harsh reality that the people of Ontario have lost faith and confidence in your ability as a minister and want you to resign and back away from the cabinet table. No one can spin you out of Lottogate, Minister. Do the honourable thing: Resign.

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): Today at Queen's Park we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the

University of Waterloo, one of three exceptional post-secondary institutions in my community. The University of Waterloo is one of Canada's most outstanding universities. For the past 15 years, U of W has been ranked most innovative in the country in the annual Maclean's university survey. For 13 of those 15 years, U of W also ranked best overall, and it boasts the largest post-secondary co-operative education program in the world.

U of W's presence extends beyond the city of Waterloo. Downtown Kitchener, for example—my hometown—will be home to the university's new health sciences campus, established through a partnership between the University of Waterloo, McMaster, the city of Kitchener and the region of Waterloo. The new campus will consist of the new U of W school of pharmacy, the new McMaster satellite medical school, and the U of W integrated primary care teaching clinic that will involve learners in medicine, pharmacy, optometry and other health disciplines working in a new integrated family health team atmosphere.

We are joined at Queen's Park today by a number of leaders from U of W, including its president, David Johnston. All members are invited to a special reception to celebrate this important milestone at 6 p.m. in the Humber Room of the Macdonald Block.

On behalf of my community and all members of this Legislature, I want to offer the University of Waterloo congratulations on 50 years of outstanding success and all the best for the future. You continue to be a source of pride for our region and for our province.

PREMIER OF ONTARIO

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Wiarton Willie now has competition from none other than ducking Dalton, the elusive Premier. As you know, the groundhog is quick to run for cover at the first sign of danger. Dalton McGuinty is doing the same. Instead of facing the Legislature yesterday, he ducked out to Peterborough and Cobourg to make announcements that would rarely warrant his presence. He was there because he didn't want to be here.

Ducking Dalton was no doubt disturbed to see his shadow there in the form of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock MPP Laurie Scott reminding him that spring can be tough on groundhogs. Ducking Dalton knows he's got problems here. He won't be able to hide much longer.

This morning at the cabinet scrum, he ducked into the safety of his burrow when the press showed their teeth. His defence of Minister Caplan has been lukewarm, to say the least. In fact, it looks like he's thrown him to the wolves to get them off his trail. That won't help, because with names like Kinsella and Warren surfacing, it's hard not to connect the dots. I can see the e-mail now: "Deeply disturbing: Detectives determine DNA Dalton's Davids. Devastating. Directive: Deny."

Oh, yes, spring is here. The wolves are hungry and groundhogs are nervous.

1340

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): Were it not for my Bill 150 calling for \$10 an hour immediately, tabled last fall, and the subsequent labour council, OFL and CLC campaign involving thousands of Ontarians sending thousands of e-mails to this government, Dalton McGuinty's government would never have announced a raise in the minimum wage. The raise they announced spread over three years does not answer the demand in Bill 150 to have a minimum wage above the low-income cut-off.

Ontarians want \$10 an hour now, not three years from now. Ontarians are not fooled by this public relations exercise masquerading as a budget, this fudge-it. They understand that this is a government that does not lead, but lags, a government whose deathbed conversion on poverty issues is simply transparent opportunism. Working families who work two jobs on minimum wage still have to use a food bank, are still working two jobs and having to use a food bank and always will if this government remains the government. Promises for the poorest and \$40,000 for Dalton McGuinty: That's what Ontario heard in Dalton McGuinty's fudge-it.

At the International Women's Day march this year the chant was, "What do we want? \$10. When do we want it? An hour." The minimum wage campaign continues. The need for \$10 an hour now continues. Enough of the fudge-it. Ontarians have spoken. Pass Bill 150, the living wage bill, now.

PARLEMENT JEUNESSE FRANCOPHONE

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): Il me fait plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue à des élèves provenant des quatre coins de la province. Ces élèves représentent l'école secondaire de leur région respective. Ils vont participer au premier Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario qui se déroulera ici-même jeudi et vendredi de cette semaine.

Les trois objectifs de ce Parlement jeunesse sont de stimuler l'intérêt et l'engagement des élèves francophones envers la politique et le fonctionnement d'un gouvernement; de permettre aux élèves de débattre des idées, d'exprimer des opinions, de défendre une position tout en développant leur capacité de leadership; de favoriser la construction identitaire et inciter les élèves à s'impliquer dans leur communauté—axes d'intervention du domaine de l'aménagement linguistique.

Le Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario est un programme unique en son genre car il implique les jeunes dans le domaine de la politique, du journalisme et des organismes non-gouvernementaux. Je tiens à remercier le ministère de l'Éducation, la FESFO ainsi que mes employés.

Selon moi, ce Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario est une des meilleures façons d'assurer la relève politique. L'Ontario a besoin des jeunes éner-

gétiques qui souhaitent se dévouer pour leur communauté et rien n'égale la politique pour ce faire.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I rise today, and I am pleased to do so to applaud the fine work being done by our government, Durham Region Transit and the Ontario Minister of Transportation, Minister Cansfield. At 8 a.m. today, 30 new buses were rolled into service in Durham region. Mr. McNeely, the parliamentary assistant to the minister, on her behalf, Durham regional chair Roger Anderson regional councillor Nester Pidwerbecki and I spoke at that unveiling in Whitby just a few hours ago. I was glad to be part of this great news. The transit investment means that commuters in my region will have a cleaner and more convenient transit system. It means that passengers with wheelchairs will have an easier time boarding the buses. And, unlike specialized services, these new vehicles do not require passengers to call ahead and book a trip. This means that people with a disability in Durham region will have more independence.

These 30 new environmentally friendly, low-floor accessible buses with air-conditioning are equipped with 38 passenger seats. It was made possible by the provincial share of the Ontario gas tax revenue and a \$10.6-million one-time transit vehicle funding package from our government as part of the 2006-07 budget.

Coupled with GO Transit service and infrastructure improvements since 2003, which included 1,200 additional parking spaces at GO Transit stations in Durham region, the government is actively addressing the transportation needs of our municipalities.

Once again I want to applaud the hard work of all those who have made this possible.

INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): I'd like to comment on the progress the McGuinty government continues to make in repairing, replacing and building new infrastructure under our five-year, \$30-billion ReNew Ontario plan after years of neglect.

In my riding of Sault Ste. Marie, ReNew Ontario has recently allowed us to break ground on two new buildings. Just last month, construction started on a new \$7.8-million youth justice centre. The Conservatives closed Sault Ste. Marie's youth justice centre despite community outrage and, instead, chose to transport the area's youth to Sudbury, costing taxpayers over \$500,000 a year. Our government is reversing this irresponsible decision by building a state-of-the-art facility to serve the needs of the Soo and area. The new facility will help ensure that young people receive the treatment, rehabilitation and programs they need closer to home, while creating 30 new jobs and helping to boost the local economy.

Also last month, I was joined by Minister Kwinter to announce the start of construction on a new \$5.6-million

OPP forensic identification unit being built as part of our government's \$50-million investment in new facilities for front-line police officers. The new 12,000-square-foot building will give law enforcement professionals access to the modern equipment they need to serve our community more effectively.

I want to commend Minister Caplan who, as Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, has had the difficult but necessary task of helping to rebuild this province after two previous governments fell well short of fulfilling their responsibilities to Ontarians. The minister is overseeing a \$5-billion capital expansion in health, the largest in the province's history, which will benefit countless Ontarians.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): I rise on a point of order to correct the record in a statement I made yesterday in the Legislature. The Harris-Eves government did not have deficits in the years 1995-2003. They ran up \$27 billion in deficits in an even shorter time, from 1995-99. They did have surpluses in three years, from 2000-03.

VISITORS

VISITEURS

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to point out that Joanne and David Brunton are down from Parry Sound today to visit and take advantage of lunch with their MPP that they bought in a fundraiser. They're here visiting and I'd like to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): Je veux souhaiter la bienvenue à tous nos élèves des écoles secondaires de langue française de l'Ontario qui proviennent des quatre coins de la province. Il vont participer, comme je l'ai déjà mentionné dans ma déclaration, au premier parlement des jeunes francophones de l'Ontario. Mais ils sont accompagnés d'un de nos anciens vice-présidents de cette chambre, Gilles Morin, qui agira comme conseiller spécial durant le déroulement de ce programme. Félicitations, et bienvenue chez nous.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a great privilege for me today to introduce two special guests from Peterborough who are in the members' east gallery.

The first person I'd like to introduce is the Honourable Andy Mitchell, who served as the very distinguished member of Parliament for Parry Sound–Muskoka from 1993 to 2006. He is currently the new president and chief executive officer of the Greater Peterborough Area Economic Development Corp.

Secondly, the vice-president of the Greater Peterborough Area Economic Development Corp., Mr. Jay Amer, whose wife, Maureen, is a cousin of our Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

I'd like to welcome both of these gentlemen to Queen's Park this afternoon.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (CHILD ACTORS), 2007

LOI DE 2007 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (ENFANTS ACTEURS)

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 191, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to child actors / Projet de loi 191, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui a trait aux enfants acteurs.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

1350

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale–High Park): This act introduces protection for child actors. It sets a maximum number of hours of work and days of work, limits late-night hours and time before the camera, ensures time off and the presence of qualified chaperones and allows for the protection of monies earned. We need protection for our most vulnerable in the entertainment industry.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

COMMODITY FUTURES LAWS REVIEW

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I rise in the House today to table the report of the Commodity Futures Act review committee. This is a fine piece of work. This review committee was appointed as a requirement of the Commodity Futures Act to review Ontario's commodity futures laws and to make recommendations for legislative changes. The committee's report will now be referred to a legislative committee that will hear the opinions of interested parties and report back.

I, on behalf of the government, appointed this committee, composed of leading practitioners, lawyers and regulators, in May 2005 to undertake a comprehensive review of Ontario's commodity futures legislation. The committee was chaired by Carol Pennycook, a partner at Davies Ward Phillips and Vineberg and former chair of the Ontario Securities Commission's Commodity Futures Advisory Board. Other members included John Clark, chair, president and CEO of J.C. Clark Ltd.; Stephen Elgee, president, Faversham Holdings Inc.; Margaret Grottenthaler, partner in Stikeman Elliott; Paul Moore, former vice-chair, Ontario Securities Commission; and Roger Warner, director of operations, Canadian Derivatives Clearing Corp.

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if we might recognize the chair and Margaret, who are here with us today. I very much appreciate the work that they've put in. By the way, coincidentally, right behind Carol is David Johnston, who's the president of the University of Waterloo and an expert in Canada on securities law; he's written books about it and whatnot. It's just a coincidence that he's here, but he's certainly welcome.

Since the Commodity Futures Act was originally introduced in 1979, advances in technology together with the globalization of financial activities have dramatically changed the capital and commodities markets. The importance of keeping pace with these changes underscored the need to review and update the Commodity Futures Act at this time.

I want to thank all the committee members for the hard work and commitment that went into preparing this report. The report's recommendations, which will be carefully reviewed and considered, are designed to make our regulatory system more efficient and, importantly, to promote increased investor confidence and investor protection.

Some of the report's key recommendations include ensuring compatibility with regulatory regimes in other relevant jurisdictions; adopting a core principles approach to the regulation of exchanges and other market participants; and providing an appropriate level of regulation of contracts for transactions involving retail investors.

This report supports our government's commitment to vibrant capital markets underpinned by a regulatory system that promotes market efficiency and investor protection.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that this review and report comprise one, but only one, significant part of this government's overall plan to modernize business legislation and financial services regulation in Ontario.

A competitive regulatory framework supports a positive investment climate and a growing economy. That is why we continue to promote the establishment of a common securities regulator. Canada, as this Legislature knows, is the only major industrialized nation without a national securities regulator. We believe that this jeopardizes our international competitiveness and limits our full economic potential.

We've also moved in several other important areas:

We implemented civil liability for secondary market investors, and we were the first jurisdiction in Canada to do that—an important move;

This Legislature passed—unanimously, I might say—the most significant reforms to Ontario's corporate and commercial laws in 50 years;

We created a new legal framework to give legal certainty for investors holding securities in electronic format within the Securities Transfer Act, 2006, which came into force on January 1, 2007—a major piece of work; plus

We made other changes to rules to protect investors, coordinated with securities regulators in all provinces, to

ensure more robust corporate and investment fund governance and enhanced financial reporting.

Modern regulation and commercial laws that protect the public interest on a cost-effective basis help companies start and grow. Armed with thorough reviews and solid recommendations such as those provided by the Commodity Futures Act committee, we can strongly advance Ontario's economic advantage.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Responses?

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Government Services and his announcement about the Commodity Futures Act and that further process around it. I thank the minister for bringing this forward. I also want to congratulate Carol Pennycook and her committee for all the hard work they've done to date in bringing this before the Legislative Assembly today. We in the official opposition look forward to being part of the process on a go-forward basis.

On an associated matter, we wish the minister had greater success. The Progressive Conservative Party supports a single regulator for the entire country. I know the minister has been working with other ministers across the country, as well as the federal finance minister, Jim Flaherty, and we hope to see progress in that regard and are supportive of achieving that single regulator for our entire nation.

I also want to use this time to comment on some associated issues with respect to an important commodity in the province of Ontario, which is the mineral sector, and the diamond industry particularly. I want to express my concern to this minister and the Minister of Finance about the sudden new tax that has been imposed on the diamond industry in the De Beers project in Attawapiskat, outside of Timmins. The minister shakes his head that this was no surprise, but certainly proponents feel otherwise.

I'd refer him to the Timmins Daily Press story of Saturday, March 24, entitled "Province Hikes Diamond Mine Tax; De Beers Has Concerns With 13% Royalty." Tom Ormsby, a spokesman for De Beers, said,

"We started this project under a certain tax model....

"Now, it appears the tax regime we based our project on has changed'" dramatically.

There was similar coverage in the National Post: "A new diamond-mine royalty proposed in the Ontario budget appears to be arbitrary and discriminatory, and was not discussed ahead of time with the diamond industry," a spokeswoman for De Beers Canada Inc. said yesterday."

We all know that mineral investments are long-term, substantial investments. In fact, I think some \$1 billion went toward the Victor mine. I wonder what kind of signal this sends to other potential proponents of similar projects in the province of Ontario, when at the last minute the Ministry of Finance pulls the rug from underneath these companies and imposes a brand new tax.

Certainly, the Progressive Conservative government previously worked very hard to raise Ontario to be the

number one mining jurisdiction not only in Canada, but in North America. I have every confidence that the current minister of mines has raised his concerns about this new tax level. I'll support any initiatives that he brings forward to restore a proper tax regime and better treatment for companies that want to invest in projects and hopefully hire a significant number of individuals from First Nations in the area.

1400

I also look forward to an opportunity to discuss with the minister, perhaps in debate, the \$50-million surprise investment to Magna corporation. Certainly, at a time when average middle-class taxpayers receive nothing—zero—from the Dalton McGuinty government, that the minister would hand out a cheque for \$50 million which was not even included in the budget speech, suddenly ad libbed—and when the minister was confronted with this the next day, he in fact had no details around the project. So one wonders what kind of negotiations took place when some \$50 million are handed out, seemingly without any competitive process or due process.

I will also point out the irony that on the eve of Magna making a multibillion-dollar bid for Chrysler, \$50 million has been allocated to the project. I would certainly think that the minister—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. I would want to caution the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Economic Development that the member for Erie–Lincoln has the floor. I need to be able to hear him. Heckling is always out of order, and we need to be able to hear all members make their statements.

The member for Erie–Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appear to have struck a nerve.

I have no doubt the Minister of Finance will be putting forward all details related to this project and explaining why this grant was given while others were not, and taxpayers got zero in the recent budget. This also brings up the question of why this is under the Ministry of Government Services in the first place. It relates to the previous issues the Minister of Finance had in his resignation.

It brings us to the important topic today, and that is that I thought the minister would be announcing that the current Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal had done the right thing and resigned, and that this minister would be taking over this file. After a barrage of newspaper stories and knowledge of this issue in advance by his top staff, the minister's hear-no-evil, see-no-evil, speak-no-evil sense just doesn't cut it. It's either incompetence or a cover-up. We had hoped that the minister would have done the honourable thing by now and resigned; and if not now, by the end of the day he should step down.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I rise to speak about the Commodity Futures Act and actually to commend the Minister of Government Services for bringing forward this act. I have read the act since this morning when his staff came forward, and I have to tell you, I

can find nothing in the act that causes me any great difficulty. I would like to commend the people who have participated in the bringing together and the writing of this act, and working with government to make sure that commodities and commodity future trading in Ontario is at least put on a competitive level field with other jurisdictions in North America and around the world.

Would that I could say the same thing about the other regulations and the other acts that need to be brought forward, and which Minister Phillips promised some three long years ago would be brought forward in this Legislature and have yet to see the light of day.

I quote from the *Globe and Mail* of a couple of days ago—last Friday—about what I consider to be a cesspool of trading in Ontario. I'm quoting from the *Globe and Mail*, Report on Business, B5, John Kipphoff and Joe Schneider. In part, what the *Globe and Mail* reports—and I'd like to read it into the record with your permission:

"Daily trading for La Senza Corp., Canada's biggest retailer of women's undergarments, more than doubled, compared with its 12-month average, and the stock price arced toward a record high. On November 15, Limited Brands Inc. announced it would buy Toronto-based La Senza and pay shareholders a 48% premium.

"That unusual trading wasn't so unusual for the Canadian market. Aberrant trading patterns preceded 33 of the 52 Canadian mergers valued at more than \$200 million last year, says a study by Measuredmarkets Inc. for Bloomberg News. Those patterns could indicate insider trading.

"'Insider trading goes on all the time,' says Stephen Jarislowsky, chief executive officer of Montreal-based Jarislowsky Fraser Ltd., which manages about \$63 billion. 'There's no real surveillance.'

"The rate of unusual trading found in Canada—63%—was higher than in the United States, where a Measuredmarkets study last year flagged 41% of comparable mergers. The London-based Financial Services Authority said on March 7 that insider trading may have preceded almost 25% of UK merger announcements in 2005.

"'If there's no publicly available news that might explain the stock's aberrant behaviour, then one might deem it suspicious,' says Measuredmarkets president Christopher Thomas, whose Port Hope, Ontario, company alerts subscribers to odd trading patterns.

"'It would appear that suspicious trading is more prevalent in Canada than the US.'

"The Ontario Securities Commission oversees the Toronto exchange, the nation's main bourse.

"'The tools available to regulators in Canada are not as strong as in the US.' ...

"Between April 1 and September 30, Canadian regulators imposed \$7.7 million in fines to settle six cases of insider trading. Nearly all of that amount—\$7.5 million—was paid by a unit of China National Petroleum Corp. to the Alberta Securities Commission....

"No one faced criminal charges in any of the six cases."

It goes on to talk about the United States of America. By comparison, last year the US Securities and Exchange Commission started 914 investigations in fiscal year 2006 and imposed a whopping US\$3.3 billion in fines.

You have promised, Mr. Phillips—I quote you before the committee three years ago, when you said to the committee, upon the rendering of our report, "Congratulations. We will implement it."

You have not implemented it. You have not implemented the five-year rotating committee. You have not implemented effective security. You have not implemented committee oversight. You have not implemented the prosecutor-adjudicator role, which you promised to change. You have not implemented anything dealing with the SROs and their role in protecting the guilty. You have not done anything that Al Rosen suggested you do in terms of changing the traditional power structures, the Canada-wide enforcement or the penalties for abusers.

I offer you congratulations for what's in here, but what isn't in here is what you were supposed to have done these last—

The Speaker: Thank you.

On a point of order, the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Speaker, based on very recent observations, I'd like unanimous consent of the House to declare this Groundhog Day.

The Speaker: Mr. Yakabuski has asked for unanimous consent. I heard a no.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Premier. Does the Premier think it's appropriate that his Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal and the person in charge of the lottery corporation showed such weak leadership that he sat on his hands for at least six months, not asking a single question about the millions in rip-offs that were taking place of people who buy the tickets from the Ontario lottery corporation and allowing the integrity of the lottery corporation to be undermined from within? Do you think that's appropriate behaviour?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this matter in the House. First of all, I want to assure all Ontarians, but especially those people—and I think particularly seniors who line up to buy a little piece of hope, to put down their loonie or their toonie or what more they desire to spend. I want to assure them that we will continue to do our utmost to protect the integrity of Ontario Lottery and Gaming and to ensure that they can have confidence and faith.

It's one thing to understand that the odds may be long, but it's another thing to have doubt when it comes to the fairness of a game. I want to assure Ontarians that we will do everything possible to guarantee the integrity of the system and to ensure that the rules by which they play those games are absolutely fair and in their interests.

1410

Mr. Tory: Of course, that was not an answer to the question, and the fact is you only thought of doing your utmost, to use your words, after your government got caught and after those very same senior citizens you talked about had been ripped off for millions—millions—of those loonies and toonies you talked about with such apparent caring.

The Premier's answer, or non-answer, says a lot about his leadership: Do nothing and duck anytime you can. Ignore the stark evidence that's swirling around—like an e-mail to Wilson Lee, the minister's chief of staff, about millions in stolen lottery prizes—and just hope it all goes away. Hope nobody notices. Hope that those poor senior citizens you talked about don't even notice that your government is sitting by, watching these games get fixed and doing absolutely nothing about it. But once it does break out, then, in the public domain, pretend that protecting the integrity of the system is your paramount concern. That's the Dalton McGuinty style of leadership.

Will you tell this House, did you have any briefings, any meetings with anybody from the lottery corporation, anybody from the board, with the minister, any memos or other correspondence at all before October—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The other thing that I wanted to say today was that I want to thank the Ombudsman for his report. He, on the basis of a television show which raised some very legitimate concerns about the integrity of Ontario Lottery and Gaming, decided of his own volition to conduct an investigation, which he rightfully chose to do. He specifically cites an incident in 1993 and then another in 2001. He said that those gave rise to still more concerns on his part and he has produced a series of in-depth, legitimate, eminently doable, eminently reasonable recommendations which we intend to adopt wholeheartedly. I understand that my good friend opposite has his own particular partisan perspective on this issue, but I intend to rely on the Ombudsman when it comes to upholding the public interest.

Mr. Tory: No, actually I'm just here on behalf of those very people you talked about. The fact is, the rip-offs reached the highest heights ever, new heights, under your leadership as Premier of this province and under your government. Weak leadership is what we have here, nothing but weak leadership and incompetence.

You see the problems all around, your minister sees the problems all around, and we're supposed to believe nobody has any meetings, there are no briefings, no questions are asked by anybody. You see and you read and you hear about this stuff and nobody does anything. The two of you sat on your duffs for months and months, and the people got ripped off in the meantime. You don't

realize it would actually look better if you had asked a question or two, or if you could get up and say you had actually asked for a briefing from somebody about this.

Your minister, I say to the Premier, is not fit to stay in office. He ought to have known if he didn't know. I think he did know. Either way, he should be asked for his resignation. Are you going to show some strong leadership for once and get up and ask for his resignation until this entire matter gets cleared up and we can see exactly who knew what and when?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I can appreciate that my friend has his own particular perspective on this. I think that what Ontarians are looking for is some objective, independent third party assessment of how we should be proceeding with respect to the concerns that have been raised. I think it's also important to understand what the Ombudsman said with respect to our government and the minister responsible, ultimately, for OLG. I quote from the Ombudsman. He said: "This is the kind of support and commitment on behalf of government which is essential if we are to move forward to restore integrity and trust in the lottery system." He goes on to say: "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

The Speaker: New question, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: My question again is to the Premier. The Toronto Sun reports today that Jim Warren, your former director of communications, and Warren Kinsella, one of your chief political operatives, met four days after the CBC program aired to try to spin the scandal, as they put it. So these two partisan McGuinty operatives are having meetings to try to spin your way out of this scandal. The Premier's very own fingerprints are all over this. If it looks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, then it's probably a cover-up.

One of them, Mr. Warren, has a very highly paid job, somewhere in the range of \$200,000 a year, as vice-president of strategic relationships. You might well ask, what would he be doing spending one minute of his time, at public expense, sitting around trying to spin scandals and cover things up for you? That's not in any job description we ever saw. If he wasn't helping you cover up, then why else is someone in his job involved in this kind of thing? We know you turned tail and ran this morning when it came time for this question, but you can't hide here. What were two partisan political operatives doing—one of them a public servant—involved in trying to cover this matter up for you at the lottery corporation?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I would think that we would try to stick to the facts today as much as we possibly can. Here are a few, just to toss a few out. Mr. Warren began his full-time employment with Ontario Lottery and Gaming in February 2006, which was over a year again. The second interesting fact is that Mr. Kinsella, as the leader of the official opposition knows, is an

independent businessman who represents from time to time many different clients, including the Ontario Hospital Association, the Toronto District School Board, and—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I know they're going to want to wait for this one, Speaker—who also was a dedicated—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I need to be able to hear the Premier.

Interjections.

The Speaker: We're wasting time.
Premier.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I know that Mr. Tory would want to acknowledge that Mr. Kinsella was a dedicated volunteer in his bid for the mayoralty. I know he would want to acknowledge that.

One of the specific recommendations made by the Ombudsman was "that the OLG keep and analyze statistical information on the number of insiders winning its various lottery products, the playing habits of insiders, and on the win history of individual insiders." That is yet another eminently reasonable and doable recommendation on the part of the Ombudsman, and that too will be acted upon.

Mr. Tory: I should say, indeed, Mr. Kinsella did help me with my campaign and he helps the Premier cover up. That's the difference between you and me, as to what we would ask him to do.

Now, here we have—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I would just urge all members to take care in their choice of words in this place.

Mr. Tory: The Premier's top political schemer and manipulator tries to spin a story that it is a total coincidence that insiders were winning more frequently because they played more frequently. It is clear that two of the top political advisers to the Premier—one of them supposedly in public service and out of partisan activity—were trying to rig a story and engineer a cover-up here, a story of incompetence and negligence that goes through the minister's office right to the Premier's office.

It's one more piece of evidence that you and your government don't care a hoot about the people who buy the tickets and the people who are getting ripped off here and you're just trying to protect your own hides. It's a reason why this minister has to go. Will you ask for the resignation of this minister, who has been so incompetent in handling this matter on behalf of your government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I can appreciate why the leader of the official opposition is struggling to make much of this. But another interesting fact that he may want to consider is that in addition to Mr. Kinsella having been a dedicated and loyal volunteer—but apparently a persona non grata now—on behalf of Mr. Tory, Bob Reid, who used to work for Premier Harris, provided communications advice to Mr. Gough, who heads up OLG.

The important point here in all of this is that there has been independent assessment of these concerns which has been presented by the Ombudsman. There are spe-

cific recommendations flowing from that. Our intention is to adopt each and every one of those recommendations. Again, if the public is searching for some non-partisan, independent, objective advice, they need look no further than the Ombudsman.

1420

Mr. Tory: What the Premier doesn't understand, because he really doesn't understand accountability, is that we're trying to talk here about the lack of leadership of your government long before the Ombudsman got involved. He got involved after you got caught. There were e-mails going back and forth to your government six months before the Ombudsman had anything to do with this file. That's when you and your minister were sitting on your duffs while people had their money stolen across this province. And so what we're saying here is, there was a complete lack of leadership and responsibility taken by you and your minister and your government.

I want to quote the Windsor Star from today. They say this: "Caplan must resign and a new minister must be appointed who cares more about cleaning up problems in Ontario's lottery system than ignoring them or covering them up." That is what the Windsor Star says today.

If you want to act like a leader, if you don't want to duck, if you want to represent the people whose money was stolen, if you want them to know the rip-offs are really over, then ask this minister for his resignation so we can get a clean start. Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, the specific incidents cited in the Ombudsman's report date from 1993 and 2001. The leader of the official opposition is going to want to have some questions of one of his colleagues, I'm sure, about that 2001 incident.

But in the interim, we will continue to act in the public interest. We'll continue to adopt each and every one of the recommendations put forward by the Ombudsman. In particular, there is one which I think is pre-eminent. The Ombudsman makes the very good point that it's simply inappropriate for the body which is responsible for the sale of tickets to somehow oversee those very same sales, and he recommends that that authority, that responsibility, be removed from the OLG, that it be given to another body, which is specifically what we intend to do. That, more than anything else, will ensure that we restore greater integrity and the ability of Ontarians to have faith in that system.

The Speaker: New question? Leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: Every week thousands of Ontarians put aside some of their hard-earned pay to buy a lottery ticket. Most of them know that they may not win, but they expect that their government, at the very least, if it's going to run a lottery, will ensure that it is a fair lottery and not one that is fraudulent. Your government, the McGuinty government, has failed to do that.

For months, your minister responsible for the lottery did nothing to protect the people of Ontario, in the face

of increasing and repeated events that would have said to any reasonable person, "There's something wrong here." Premier, how do you justify keeping Mr. Caplan in his job when he has so obviously failed to protect the public over and over and over again?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think it would be in the public interest that we take a look at the specific recommendations put forward by the Ombudsman. He specifically says that the government should implement a regulatory scheme for lotteries with the following characteristics: "(a) a code of conduct for retailers, the breach of which would lead to sanctions up to and including termination of registration." By the way, this particular regulatory regime or regulatory scheme we're going to put in place will be headed up by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission.

It's interesting to note that when it comes to casinos in Ontario, it is not OLG which is responsible as the regulatory overseer; rather, it is the Alcohol and Gaming Commission. What we intend to do on behalf of Ontarians is ensure that they can have confidence in the lottery system by taking the responsibility of oversight away from the OLG and giving that to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, and that is in keeping with the recommendations of the Ombudsman.

Mr. Hampton: What the Ombudsman has to say is good and fine, but the question is this: What was your minister doing in the months and years prior to the Ombudsman's report? Ordinary Ontarians feel totally betrayed and they're wondering what is going on over there.

One woman who wrote to us said, "For every fraudulent winner, there is a corresponding loser, like the older gentleman in The Fifth Estate story. I am outraged."

Another woman writes, "I will not have any trust or faith in a government that allows a minister to continue working when he failed miserably."

Premier, at what point are you going to admit that your government failed in its duty to protect Ontario citizens? When are you going to fire this minister who obviously didn't do his job?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Our focus will remain where it should be, and in keeping with the public interest. Ontarians who may have concerns connected with the OLG want to know what we're going to do to ensure that we can restore their faith in the integrity of that very system. Again, there has been an independent, objective assessment made by the Ombudsman, but we've taken it beyond that. We've turned over all the information to the police and asked them to take a look at it as well.

I think the single most important recommendation arising from the Ombudsman's investigation is that we take responsibility for oversight, for regulation of those ticket sales, away from OLG and give it to an independent organization. That's exactly what we intend to do. We're going to give it to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission.

Some very legitimate concerns have been raised. The Ombudsman has provided us with some very sound

advice and the best way to address those concerns, and we will continue to act on that advice.

Mr. Hampton: Once again, Premier, you want to talk about what you're going to do now after you got caught. But ordinary folks around Ontario who have been cheated out of millions of dollars want to know what the repercussions are for the person in charge who was supposed to protect them, who all the time said, "I see nothing, I hear nothing, I know nothing."

Today we learn that some of the highest-profile political advisers to you and your government, right after The Fifth Estate story was advanced, met to talk about, "How do we undermine this story about lottery fraud? How do we get this story below the radar screen?" And what does your minister say? He says, "I didn't know about that. I didn't hear about that. I didn't see anything about that."

I ask you again, Premier, at what point do you fire a minister who's apparently happy to say, "I don't see anything, I don't hear anything, I don't know anything," while thousands of innocent people were ripped off—

The Speaker: The question's been asked. Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I think it really is worthwhile for us to consider once again the independent, objective assessment of the minister and our government through this report. He says, and again I quote, "This is the kind of support and commitment on behalf of government which is essential if we are to move forward to restore integrity and trust in the lottery system. I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

We're grateful for the Ombudsman's report. We intend to act on these recommendations, each and every one of them. And again, I say to the people of Ontario, we will do whatever we have to do to ensure that you can have faith in your Ontario lottery and gaming system.

The Speaker: New question? The leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: To the Premier: I want to talk about faith in the system. Last October, when people saw the CBC story, your minister said that he didn't know anything until then. But we learn today that almost immediately Warren Kinsella, one of your political fixers, and your former director of communications met to talk about a damage control plan. Your minister says, "I didn't know anything," but top Liberal fixers were already swinging into action to put this below the public radar screen.

Premier, do you expect the people of Ontario to believe a McGuinty government that says it saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing, when top Liberal fixers were already swinging into action to undermine the effect that this might have in terms of fraudulent lotteries?

1430

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I beg to differ with my friend. I don't think it's about my expectations of the people of Ontario; I think it's about their expectations of us. What are we going to do in light of this information and in light

of the Ombudsman's report? I think they expect us to act on it. They expect our commitment to do everything specifically recommended within this report. They expect us to ensure that when they put their money down on the counter and buy a lottery ticket in Ontario, they can have faith in the system, that they can understand and honestly believe that the game is fair. While the odds may be long, they are more than prepared to take on those risks, but they don't take on any risks associated with there being any weakness in the integrity of the system itself. That's the legitimate expectation on the part of the people of Ontario of this government. We intend to live up to that expectation. We will adopt every single recommendation found in this report.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, these are the legitimate expectations of those innocent people out there who buy lottery tickets: They expect that when the minister who's responsible hears that an innocent man, an 82-year-old man, is taking the lottery corporation to court over lottery fraud, the minister is going to have enough sense to ask some questions, "What's going on here?" Your minister didn't. They expect that when e-mails come from reporters saying they want to know about possible other insider lottery fraud, something's going to twig in your minister's head, and he's going to say, "Maybe I'd better ask some questions here." Your minister didn't. Through all of this, while people were being ripped off and cheated, your minister was happy to sit there in the dark, not ask any questions, not raise any issues and not do anything to protect people.

Premier, don't you think that the people of Ontario deserve something better than a minister who says, "I see nothing, I hear nothing, I know nothing, and I'm not going to do anything to protect the public of Ontario"?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: What I do believe is that the people of Ontario deserve to have an Ontario lottery and gaming system in which they can have confidence, and I can understand if that confidence has been somewhat shaken of late. Something happened in 2001; something happened in 1993. That led to a very legitimate inquiry on the part of the Ombudsman. He has conducted, in a relatively short period of time, a very thorough investigation. He came up with some very substantive and specific recommendations.

We think that they are all eminently doable, reasonable and, for that matter, essential, so we will adopt each and every one of those recommendations. We intend, once again, to ensure that somebody who approaches an Ontario lottery and gaming counter at some convenience store or some kiosk in a mall—we intend to ensure that when they put that money down, whether it is a loonie or a toonie, while the odds may be long, they can have confidence in the game itself being fair. We intend to do that.

Mr. Hampton: The fact of the matter is, Premier, your government, for over two years, didn't do that. Here's what those innocent Ontarians see: a minister who sat there, and while the evidence accumulated which would have led any reasonable person to at least start

asking questions, he did nothing. Then what they see is, when the information becomes public, your top Liberal Party fixer, Mr. Kinsella, and your former director of communications get together to hatch a plan to try to keep this off the public radar screen, to keep it away from the newscasts.

So, Premier, my question is this: Can you give the people of Ontario any reason why they should believe you and your minister now when he has obviously failed completely until now?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, with a view to providing some assurances to Ontarians, particularly those who buy tickets through the lottery system, in addition to adopting these recommendations put forward by the Ombudsman and in addition to providing information to the police so that they can do with it as they feel is appropriate under the circumstances, I have also asked the minister to make inquiries with his counterparts in the Atlantic provinces and in British Columbia, where concerns have been raised in those jurisdiction as well, to find out how we can best share our best practices, to see if it might be in our interest to adopt, if not a formal one, then perhaps an informal national standard, so that we can continue to improve the quality of the Ontario lottery and gaming system on behalf of Ontarians.

The Speaker: New question.

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby-Ajax): My question is to the minister responsible for lotteries. Minister, it's not only a matter of public precedent but it's a question of integrity and accountability that when a minister's capability to serve the public's best interest is called into serious question, he or she will resign or step aside pending an investigation into the matter.

Members of our caucus have held themselves to this rigorous standard without delay and without reserve. Although they were later cleared of any wrongdoing, my colleagues from both Leeds-Grenville and Simcoe-Grey stood in their places and resigned because it was the right thing to do.

Minister, why is it you feel that you should be held to a different set of standards than ministers have been held to in the past?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): In fact, I understand that members opposite have their own partisan views on the way things work around here. I rely upon the unbiased, non-partisan, independent officer of this Legislature who says, and I know the member is very interested in this, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

Now, the member would be very interested in the Ombudsman's press conference on Monday. He said, "I conclude that they"—the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.—"put profits ahead of public service. I think there was a point, a crossroads, in" the year "2002.... At that point, the OLG could have gone two ways. It could have said, 'We'll apply the law and take the measures to act

diligently. One month later, Bob Edmonds surfaced, and they pretended that binding law from the Supreme Court didn't apply."

The minister of the day was Norm Sterling, the member—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mrs. Elliott: Minister, the fact of the matter is that my colleagues resigned their ministerial posts under what is described as, and I'm quoting from today's Sun, "clouds ... far less than this boondoggle at OLG." But since you insist on characterizing our calls for you to adhere to the fundamental principle of ministerial accountability as partisan, let's go back a little bit in time. The bottom line is that this precedent has been adhered to by parties on all sides of this House for years and years. Twenty years ago, on June 16, 1986, this standard was adhered to by a minister of your own party, one Elinor Caplan.

Minister, this is a matter of integrity, responsibility and public interest. Why won't you follow the example set by your own mother and resign?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I truly believe that taking responsibility means rolling up your sleeves and fixing the problem that others have left to you. That's exactly what I, as minister, am doing. That's what this government is doing. We've shone a light on the problems that existed and that, in fact, the members opposite were only too happy to sweep under the rug and keep in the dark corners in some closet. It has been this minister and this government who have called in KPMG, who have welcomed the Ombudsman's investigation and adopted his report and recommendations. It has been this government, when the allegation of fraud came, that directed that the information the Ombudsman reviewed be passed along to the Ontario Provincial Police.

Those are the appropriate and responsible actions, unlike what we've seen in the year 2002 under Mr. Sterling, the member for Lanark-Carleton, unlike my friend, unfortunately, the member from Erie-Lincoln, who was also a minister of this corporation—

The Speaker: New question. Leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: A question to the Premier: The spin that was concocted by your former director of communications and by Warren Kinsella, the Liberal Party's political fixer, was that there really wasn't that much insider lottery fraud because, in fact, the retailers play the lottery more often. Now, the Ombudsman has said that that's false, that that whole thing was false and concocted.

My question is this: Why did your government allow an explanation to be put out to the public that the Ombudsman himself says was false and had absolutely no relevance and no integrity to it? Why would your government allow that kind of story to be put out by your Liberal fixers to try to undermine the issue of lottery fraud?

1440

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: In fact, the Ombudsman specifically addressed the concern connected with the

absence of reliable data that the OLG should have been collecting. He provides a specific recommendation. He says, "I recommend that the OLG keep and analyze statistical information on the number of insiders winning its various lottery products, the playing habits of insiders, and on the win history of individual insiders."

Again, there was an issue, I gather, within OLG as to whether or not they should be keeping that kind of information. I think the Ombudsman has spoken on that very clearly, and the OLG has specifically said that they will adopt that recommendation, and they intend to put it in place very shortly. I think that's the issue that Ontarians have, that they're now collecting this kind of information so that they're aware of it and can act on it accordingly. In fact, they are now beginning that process.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, your Liberal Party fixers, your former director of communications and Warren Kinsella were doing this before the Ombudsman reported. These are about their activities long before the Ombudsman reported, and my question is: I would presume that the minister in charge knows something. I would presume that Mr. Kinsella and your former director of communications, Mr. Warren, were not acting somehow as independent agents from somewhere else. Who would have authorized these two high-profile Liberal Party fixers to spin such a story to the public that the Ombudsman says is false and had no foundation?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think what my colleague is getting at is the statistical information that had been assembled by the expert used by The Fifth Estate, and the Ombudsman comments on that very specifically. He says, "For my office's investigation, we retained our own expert.... He echoed the comments of some of the others on the unreliability of the data on which Prof. Rosenthal's assessment was based." But specifically, he goes on to say, "In his view, the type of probability analysis carried out by Prof. Rosenthal is useful and could signal to the corporation the need to take steps to prevent insider fraud." He then goes on specifically to recommend that the OLG connect to this kind of information on an ongoing basis. I think that's a very sound recommendation. The OLG has adopted that, and they intend to have that process in place very shortly.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, parents across Ontario want the best for their children, and as such, encourage them to pursue higher education to expand their opportunities. This encouragement often directs young Ontarians towards Ontario's excellent universities, where students can pursue various fields of interest and build the skills they will need for jobs in a variety of sectors. Often overlooked, however, is the fact that there are good, high-paying jobs in the skilled trades sector. Students should be made aware that a job in a trade is a possible career option. This is an issue that needs to be

addressed. Minister, what is this government of Ontario doing to encourage students to look towards the trades and college trades programs as viable options for high school graduates?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to thank my colleague from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh for his advocacy on the part of his community and to make sure that we have a training system that meets the needs, not only of his community but of the province. We're working at all levels. First of all we're giving students in high school the opportunity to experience the trades through the Ontario youth apprenticeship program; almost 26,000 students this year, including many in his community, will have that chance. We've developed new approaches to get into the trades with the co-op diploma program. I know St. Lawrence College, which has a very important Cornwall campus, received \$1.6 million over the past year for co-op diploma programs that they put on.

We've also provided additional funds for the apprenticeship training spots, and again, St. Lawrence College, \$1.5 million, so they can ensure that the apprentices get their training locally, in the Cornwall region, and of course we have the apprenticeship training tax credit to ensure that employers in areas such as Cornwall and his riding are able to hire apprentices and give them the training they need so they can become the skilled trades for the future. That's a plan at all levels, and it's working in all of Ontario, including his community.

Mr. Brownell: I certainly know of the great programs at St. Lawrence College in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, and I will be there tomorrow afternoon to meet with the CEO and president of that college. The students who graduate from its programs do so with valuable skill sets that they can apply to work situations.

Ontario's colleges have a great deal to offer. Certainly, the support being given to encourage students to consider a college diploma is important. It is equally important that our colleges receive the supports they deserve to ensure that they remain competitive.

Minister, can you tell us what this government is doing in terms of financial supports and continuing support for the colleges across this province?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Again, an excellent question—an excellent contrast between the McGuinty government and what went on before.

For about 12 years, college budgets were flatlined or worse, but beginning with the Reaching Higher investment plan, we're investing \$6.2 billion, and the college budgets themselves, in about three years, will go up by 26% on average. The Tories spent their first year cutting the budgets by 20%.

St. Lawrence College, just over the past year, in the fall, in good part because of the advocacy of the honourable member, received \$3.5 million from the fall economic statement, and will receive additional monies, which will be announced in due course, from the extra

\$105 million in the 2007 budget recently announced by my colleague the Minister of Finance.

The bottom line is that we're supporting colleges, as they had not been supported by the previous two governments, to ensure that the people throughout Ontario, and particularly, I would say, in Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, receive the excellent education locally that they need, not only so they can succeed but so that the economy of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The minister of lotteries said that I was in charge of the OLG during 2002. That is not correct. I was not in charge of the—

The Speaker: That is not a point of order.

ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Premier, who today has been trying to deflect responsibility from his government and his minister for the scandal in the lottery system in Ontario.

I want to quote from page 20 of the Ombudsman's report: "It appears that 2004 was a banner year for controversial insider prize claims. It is mind-boggling that the corporation actually paid out millions of dollars in the circumstances it did."

You were the government in 2004, Premier. We did a search of the number of times you demanded the resignations of ministers of past governments during the time you were sitting in this chair as Leader of the Opposition—a mind-boggling number of times, for a variety of reasons, which don't stand up to comparison with respect to the responsibilities of the minister you're defending here today.

Can you give us a brief explanation of what kind of standards you expect from the ministers who serve in your cabinet?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Again, on behalf of the public, I think it really is important to distinguish between the partisan perspective brought by my friends opposite—and I understand why they've got to do that. I spent 13 years in opposition, and I wish Mr. Tory 13 good years in opposition—very productive years, as well, I might say.

Our job over here now is to uphold the public interest and lend definition to that as well. In the circumstances, I believe the single most important thing we can do on behalf of Ontarians is to restore faith in the integrity of the Ontario lottery and gaming system by wholeheartedly adopting the recommendations contained within the Ombudsman's report. That's what we're doing and that's what we'll continue to do.

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Mr. Runciman: The Premier says that when you're in opposition, you've got to do what you've got to do. I

guess that means he didn't mean it when he said it over here, and it carried over to his election platform, because obviously he didn't care about the truth in that situation.

The reality is, this government, this minister knew many, many months ago about the problems and the challenges in the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. They knew about it and they did nothing. This minister sat on his hands. We know that it was made public by The Fifth Estate and CBC—very serious allegations, including the possibility of obstruction of justice. And we are to believe that he did nothing and he knew nothing? Now you've got your spinmeisters involved for political reasons to try to spin this to minimize the political damage.

Is that the kind of person you want serving in your cabinet? If you do, that says a great deal about your standards of integrity and your leadership.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: If we're looking for a non-partisan, dispassionate, objective, thoughtful, considered analysis of our government and its response and of the minister's activities, I again refer my friend opposite to the report the Ombudsman provided, where he specifically said, "This is the kind of support and commitment on behalf of government which is essential if we are to move forward to restore integrity and trust in the lottery system." He goes on to say, "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

We've got a great report from the Ombudsman, we wholeheartedly adopt and embrace that report, and we will move forward on each and every one of those recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question? Leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: Your minister responsible for lotteries says that while there was a lawsuit alleging fraud at the lottery corporation, he wasn't aware of that; while the lottery corporation spent \$600,000 fighting an 82-year-old man and trying to silence him and keep the story out of the media, he wasn't aware of that. E-mails were coming in, asking about other potential lottery fraud situations; he wasn't aware of that. Your former communications assistant and high-profile Liberal fixer Warren Kinsella went to work right after the CBC story, trying to put together a spin plan to undermine the whole story. He says he wasn't aware of that.

Premier, how could these events happen and the minister not know anything? Is the lottery corporation a rogue agency that keeps your government deliberately in the dark? How could this happen and the minister responsible not know any of these things?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I always appreciate the colourfulness and creativity of my friend opposite in terms of his presentation of information. He's very creative. But one of the things that the OLG does, in case the leader of the NDP is now prepared to throw the baby out with the bathwater, is in fact provide us with about \$2.3 billion in

revenue on an annual basis. That is very important by way of ensuring that we have the necessary financial support for our schools, our hospitals and our infrastructure. The Ontario lottery system has served us well in so many ways since first brought into being in 1975, I think, with the first Wintario lottery.

There are some problems of late. They have cropped up, not only in Ontario but in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and BC, and perhaps in some other jurisdictions as well here in Canada. Fortunately, we have an Ombudsman who has jumped into this. He has, in very short order, put forward some specific recommendations—

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: The Ombudsman says that your government was more interested in collecting the lottery money than it was in protecting the public.

But Premier, once again you try to avoid the question. You see, here is the scenario: If high-profile Liberal fixers like your former director of communications and Warren Kinsella can be hired to put together a spin story to undermine the whole issue of lottery fraud and your minister doesn't know about it, it suggests one of two things: Either your minister is completely incompetent or the lottery corporation is a rogue agency.

Now there is a way to clear this up. You can order the minister today to release his briefing books, his records and his e-mail files so that the people of Ontario will know whether the lottery corporation was a rogue agency or your minister was just completely incompetent. Will you order the minister to release the briefing books, the records and the e-mail files?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP does not know, because I've read it several times, that the minister was commended by the Ombudsman for his co-operation in his investigation. Any information to which the Ombudsman would have needed access was undoubtedly provided to him, and on the basis of all that information and after giving this matter some very careful consideration, he came up with some very specific recommendations. Those are designed not to advance the political interests of the leader of the NDP; they're designed to better uphold the public interest. That's what this report is specifically designed to do. It contains some very solid and strong recommendations. We embrace this report wholeheartedly. We will act on each and every one of those recommendations.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): My question is for my good friend the Minister of Culture. Normally I would just lean over and ask her this question, but it's such a good question, I'm sure she wants to provide a good answer.

Minister, my riding is host to many talented artists, as you know, who do amazing work that enriches our local communities and enhances the quality of life. Artists in our province, we know from the recent visit to our riding by yourself, have felt unrecognized and unappreciated by previous governments.

I know through your council for the arts and culture, you undertook an extensive consultation with over 4,000 individual artists and organizations. Can you share with this House what steps you are taking to support our artists and creators throughout the province?

Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture): I want to thank the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot for his support of artists. It was a pleasure for me to be at the Potter's Café and meet a number of artists in his riding. Artists, as creators, express and mirror the spirit and dreams of a society. They tell our stories and give vitality to our society, but beyond this, they enhance and strengthen our province's creative and innovative economic development.

As a result, we have introduced the Status of Ontario's Artists Act with this year's budget bill. Should this act become law, artists will finally, after nine years of being treated as irrelevant by the Progressive Conservative government and after five years of the NDP sitting on three reports—we have moved forward on this legislation.

Mr. McMeekin: That's wonderful news. You're doing a wonderful job. I know that the arts' organizations across Ontario are going to be excited to hear about this new legislation.

Minister, you and I and all members of the government on this side of the House appreciate our artists. You referenced the hopeful passage of the status of Ontario artists legislation. I know that's just a start. I know you've got many other wonderful and clever things that you're about as Minister of Culture, but I wonder if you'd take just a moment to share those other wonderful things with members of the House.

Hon. Ms. Di Cocco: All told, the investments in culture in this year's proposed budget total almost \$77 million more. Coupled with our status of Ontario artists legislation, this support is a clear statement of my government's commitment to arts and culture. The Ontario Trillium Foundation will benefit from \$20 million more in annual funding. The Ontario Arts Council, an important source of funding for individuals and organizations, will see a 38% increase. The arts endowment fund will receive \$10 million; the Ontario Media Development Corp., an added \$5 million. Public libraries will see \$5 million more, and we're providing museums with \$2.3 million more in operating funds, as was quoted by the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

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ONTARIO LOTTERY AND GAMING CORP.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Premier. In spite of the fact that all evidence, including e-mails exchanged between senior members of staff and e-mails to senior members of staff—in spite of the fact that all of that points to the minister knowing full well about this investigation and the problems at OLG fully six months before the CBC in-

vestigation—he continues to fall back on a famous Liberal tactic: deny, deny, deny. The fact that he continues to deny does not make that denial any more credible or believable. People do not believe it. It is time for him to accept responsibility and step aside so that a complete, impartial investigation can take place.

Premier, will you not, for the sake of the integrity of the system in this province, and on behalf of all Ontarians, ask your minister to do the right thing, once and for all, and please resign?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): We do have an independent, impartial officer of this Legislature who did a thorough investigation of this matter. In fact, he said at his press conference on Monday—I don't know if the full quote got in, so I want to quote it for this member:

"I conclude that they," the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., "put profits ahead of public service. I think there was a point, a crossroads, in" the year "2002. At that point, the OLG could have gone two ways. It could have said, 'We'll apply the law and take the measures to act diligently.' One month later, Bob Edmonds surfaced, and they pretended that binding law from the Supreme Court didn't apply. Then it became a slippery slope."

I have checked with the legislative library. Contrary to what we've heard from the member from Lanark–Carleton, he was installed as the minister in 2002 through to 2003. These are the facts of the matter. They were swept under the rug. They were put in a closet. This government has shone a light on it. This government has acted to protect the public interest.

Mr. Yakabuski: Premier, the minister denies; you deflect. I'm not surprised. That seems to be your tactic as well.

Every member of this House, on both sides, every member of that press gallery, and I believe every citizen in the province of Ontario who has been following this does not believe the minister when he says that he did not know about this investigation or the problems at OLG prior to October 2006. Every member of this House believes that he knew, and the people believe it. In fact, the Windsor Star believes it so much that they've called for his resignation. To protect the integrity of this House, he should resign.

Premier, I'm going ask you: Under the cloud that this minister is living under, will you not, for the sake of the integrity of this system across this province, so that we can get on with the other important matters in this House, ask this minister to step aside so that we can get to bottom of this—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: In fact, an unbiased, independent officer of this Legislature, the Ombudsman—non-

partisan—did in fact comment on the conduct of myself and the government. He says in his report, and I'll quote page 68 for the purposes of the member: "I commend the minister and the government for its openness and responsiveness to my report and recommendations and for their immediate and resolute commitment to ensuring change."

The Ombudsman is quite correct. This government has set a new standard for openness and transparency, for taking action where others swept it under the rug, for making sure that public accountability is maintained and the public trust and confidence is put first. I'm very proud of those actions. I can share with the member as well that I have directed that all materials that were reviewed by the Ombudsman be forwarded to the Ontario Provincial Police for their review, and they will decide the appropriate—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question. The leader of the third party.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): Premier, your minister continues to claim that over a two-year period he heard nothing, he saw nothing, he knew nothing, but his chief of staff, Wilson Lee, told the *Globe and Mail* that he was aware of some problems. When e-mails started arriving from the lottery corporation advising of media requests for information in April 2006, Mr. Lee told the *Globe and Mail* that the lottery corporation was steadfast that the insider policy was sound and that there were no real problems. He now says, "We now know in hindsight that there were significant concerns." Premier, this raises the issue: Was Mr. Lee, the chief of staff to your minister, fed misleading information by the lottery corporation or, like the minister, was he asleep?

There's a way to settle this. Release the minister's e-mails, records—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The member, of course, refers to a freedom-of-information request, and the information that was requested by the media outlet was provided. They did their analysis—

Interjection.

The Speaker: I'd ask the member from Niagara Centre to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Withdrawn.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The freedom-of-information and protection of privacy legislation, which all members of this House have worked under, was adhered to and the information was provided. The Ombudsman, in his report, says quite clearly that Ontario Lottery and Gaming did not provide a proper response to the CBC; they did not treat the matter with the utmost seriousness that it deserved. He indicated that they treated it as a public relations exercise, as opposed to dealing with the substantive matters raised in the report. I agree. I agree with the Ombudsman's findings. That's why I agree with his recommendations, and I'm working diligently with my

colleagues to implement the solution. That's the response.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, these are all events that happened before the Ombudsman's report. Mr. Lee, now chief of staff to your minister, seems to be indicating that he was misled by the lottery corporation in April and May of 2006. He seems to be indicating that he now knows that the information that was given to him by the lottery corporation in April and May of 2006 was false. Not only that, but when the CBC story was put out, your minister said, "The Insider Win policy provides the utmost integrity of the OLG in the conduct of lottery games by ensuring that there is no perception of an unfair advantage...." So even your minister was apparently being fed misleading information during this period.

There is a way to clear this up, Premier. You should ask the minister to release his e-mails, his briefing books and his own records. Then we will know if—

The Speaker: The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: The Ombudsman is very clear, when he analyzes and goes over the facts, that OLG certainly did not provide the proper understanding and seriousness. He says quite clearly in his report that such statistical analysis as was done by CBC's *Fifth Estate* was not done, there were no records kept and they should have been. The Ombudsman has recommended that, going forward, Ontario Lottery and Gaming keep such statistics, provide that analysis and have the baseline for comparison so that they can do the work and make sure that the public is safeguarded.

I accept that recommendation, and we are working to implement it along with the 60 other recommendations from both the Ombudsman and KPMG. Seventeen have already been implemented, 25 will be complete by the end of June and the other 18 have begun and are ongoing. I look forward to reporting to the Ombudsman and to this House, quite frankly, about all the work we have done to—

The Speaker: Thank you. Petitions.

1510

PETITIONS

CONSENT TO TREATMENT

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): "Petition to the government of Ontario in Parliament assembled.

"We, the undersigned, draw the attention of the House to the following:

"Whereas the Health Care Consent Act of Ontario gives to all health practitioners, indiscriminately, the sole authority to determine whether or not a child of any age has the capacity to give or refuse consent to treatment proposed for him and her; and

"Whereas many of the health care practitioners who are required to make such judgments have neither the training nor the knowledge of child development such that their judgments could be considered informed; and

"Whereas health care practitioners in the family planning industry are notoriously biased in their approach to supplying abortions and chemical contraceptives/abortifacients to minors; and

"Whereas the HCCA is unconstitutional as it provides no opportunity for parents to prevent health care practitioners from providing inappropriate treatment to their child before it is administered, nor any mechanism for redress afterwards;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the Health Care Consent Act to prohibit health care practitioners from administering a plan of treatment proposed for a child who lives under the care and control of a custodial parent without the prior consent of the custodial parent, whether or not the health care practitioner is of the opinion that the child is capable with respect to the plan of treatment."

As required by the rules of order, I affix my name thereto.

GTA POOLING

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's titled very simply "End GTA Pooling: Pass Ontario Budget." It reads as follows:

"Whereas the city of Mississauga faces a long-term labour shortage, resulting in some 60,000 more people commuting into the city of Mississauga than leave Mississauga to earn their living and support their families each and every day; and

"Whereas 10 years ago the Ontario government of that day introduced the concept of GTA pooling, whereby funds are taken from the municipalities surrounding the city of Toronto and channelled into the city of Toronto without benefit or accountability to the taxpayers of those fast-growing cities, which face big-city needs and issues of their own; and

"Whereas GTA pooling places an additional tax burden on the municipal property tax bases of some \$40 million each and every year to the city of Mississauga; and

"Whereas the government of Ontario in its 2007-08 budget proposes to completely eliminate GTA pooling during a seven-year span beginning in fiscal year 2007-08, and that as pooling is phased out, Ontario will take responsibility for social assistance and social housing costs currently funded by GTA pooling;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all parties within the government of Ontario support the swift passage of the 2007-08 Ontario budget and ensure that its provisions ending GTA pooling are implemented."

On behalf of the people of western Mississauga, I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition and ask page Ryan to carry it for me.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mrs. Christine Elliott (Whitby-Ajax): I have a petition arising out of a community issue organized by Mr. Paul Taylor.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I'm pleased to sign this in support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I want to thank Karen Milligan, administrator at Bay Haven Nursing Home in Collingwood, for sending me that. I agree with the petition, and I have signed it.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most individuals and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I affix my name in full support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's rare opportunity that I get to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of the riding of Durham. I have so many of them here. The one I chose reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

"Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

"Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

"Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

"Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

"Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007 and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with committing to provide \$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds."

I'm pleased to present this petition to Jenalle from Elgin-Middlesex-London, and I sign it on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources plays a vital role in the conservation and management of the natural resources that belong to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas the MNR budget for 2006-07 is 24% less, in real terms, than it was in 1992-93; and

"Whereas vital programs relating to fish and wildlife, provincial parks, enforcement, forestry, and other MNR activities continue to be cut back; and

"Whereas the aesthetic, economic, educational, environmental, recreational and social value of our natural resources far exceeds the cost of protecting and managing them;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That funding of the Ministry of Natural Resources be increased to a level that will enable it to stop cutting existing programs and provide full funding to all existing programs as well as any new programs that may be required to ensure the effective protection and management of Ontario's natural resources."

I fix my name in full support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I have a petition here that is identical to the one read by the member for Durham, which I don't have to read again. It comes from Alexandria and Dalkeith area and all the community around that area. I will give that to Jordan, and he will present that to the Clerk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Petitions, the member from Durham.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Speaker, I prefer to default to the member from Burlington because she has a petition as well.

1520

LAKERIDGE HEALTH

Mrs. Joyce Savoline (Burlington): I have a petition regarding Lakeridge Health.

"Whereas we, the undersigned, believe that Lakeridge Health should have full funding and not be facing an \$8-million shortfall;

"Whereas this would affect many programs, including" and especially "the mental health program at Lakeridge Health;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully fund the \$8-million shortfall for Lakeridge Health."

I'm happy to sign my name.

STEVENSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital needs \$1.4 million in new funding over the next three years to get its birthing unit reopened and to ensure that they can recruit enough obstetricians and health care providers to supply a stable and ongoing service for expectant mothers in our area; and

“Whereas forcing expectant mothers to drive to Newmarket, Barrie or Orangeville to give birth is not only unacceptable, it is a potential safety hazard; and

“Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital cannot reopen the unit under its current budget and the McGuinty government has been unresponsive to repeated requests for new funding;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty Liberal government immediately provide the required \$1.4 million in new funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital so that the local birthing unit can reopen and so that mothers can give birth in Alliston.”

Obviously, I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure once again to read a petition. I literally get thousands of these and they are important. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario will not meet the needs of its aging population and ensure access to hospital services unless long-term-care homes can provide the care and services that residents need; and

“Whereas staff are now run off their feet trying to keep up and homes are unable to provide the full range of care and programs that residents need” and deserve “or the menu choices that meet their expectations; and

“Whereas dietary, housekeeping and other services that residents and their families value are being put at risk by increasing operating costs; and

“Whereas some 35,000 residents still live in older homes, many with three- and four-bed ward rooms and wheelchair-inaccessible washrooms; and

“Whereas, on November 23, 2006, this Legislature unanimously passed a private member's motion asking the government to introduce a capital renewal program for B and C homes; and

“Whereas such a program is required to support the limited-term licensing provisions in the proposed new Long-Term Care Homes Act;

Therefore “we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$390 million in 2007”—there's nothing in the budget, really—and \$214 million in 2008 to provide an additional 30 minutes of resident care, enhance programs and meal menus and address other

operating cost pressures, and introduce a capital renewal and retrofit program for all B and C homes, beginning with” a commitment of “\$9.5 million this year to renew the first 2,500 beds.”

I'm pleased to present this petition to Cody from the riding of Mississauga South and sign this on behalf of my constituents in Durham.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, according to the Department of National Defence, there are over 30,000 serving military personnel calling Ontario home; and

“Whereas, according to the most recent census data, there are more than 1.6 million senior citizens over the age of 65 living in Ontario; and

“Whereas the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario plans on eliminating this illegitimate health tax for all Ontarians after it forms the government; and

“Whereas, as an interim measure, the illegitimate health tax should be removed from those who protect Canada and those who have built Ontario;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately eliminate the illegitimate health tax, beginning with serving military personnel and senior citizens.”

I affix my name in full support.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition for Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare funding. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas demand for health services is expected to continue to rise with a growing retirement population in Muskoka-East Parry Sound; and

“Whereas studies indicate that overcrowded emergency rooms result in higher mortality rates; and

“Whereas growing demand and lack of availability of long-term-care beds place increased pressure on acute care beds; and

“Whereas the operating budget for MAHC must reflect the growing demand for service in the communities of Muskoka-East Parry Sound;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the McGuinty government and the Minister of Health provide adequate increases in the operating budget of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare to maintain current health services for the people of Muskoka-East Parry Sound and allocate more long-term-care beds for Muskoka-East Parry Sound.”

I support this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR LES ESPÈCES EN VOIE
DE DISPARITION

Mr. Ramsay moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 184, An Act to protect species at risk and to make related changes to other Acts / Projet de loi 184, Loi visant à protéger les espèces en péril et à apporter des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Mr. Ramsay.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): It's a pleasure for me to rise in my place today to lead off second reading of a piece of legislation that I and the McGuinty government are very proud of. I'd like to just notify the House that I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Sault Ste. Marie.

If passed, this legislation would represent a milestone in the protection and recovery of Ontario's species at risk and establish a benchmark for the rest of North America. By extending protection for species and their habitats, the new act would also help ensure that future generations of Ontarians will enjoy the benefits of a healthy, abundant and biologically diverse natural environment.

Biological diversity is one of the greatest treasures of our planet. Unfortunately, throughout the world, species of animals, plants and other organisms are being lost forever at an alarming rate.

Right now in Ontario, more than 175 of the province's 30,000 species are identified as being at risk. This means they may disappear from our province if their current rate of decline continues, lending urgency to our task here today. The proposed legislation I am presenting for second reading today would help us reverse that rate of decline in Ontario by providing more effective protection provisions for native species and their habitats.

The proposed legislation also includes a stronger commitment to implement species recovery measures, and it provides more support for volunteer stewardship from private landowners, resource users, stakeholders and partners who want to do their part in protecting or restoring essential habitat.

It's important to note that the proposed legislation is the outcome of a very extensive public review of the current Endangered Species Act that I launched last May. An impressive amount of work was undertaken during this review to ensure that we have properly identified and addressed the measures needed for optimum protection and recovery of species and their habitats.

The ministry met with a wide range of stakeholders to discuss ideas for the proposed legislative changes. These groups include farmers, rural landowners, land developers, environmentalists, rural communities, municipalities

and representatives of resource industries, including forestry and mining.

We are also grateful for the contributions of an advisory panel that was made up of individuals with experience and expertise related to species-at-risk protection and recovery planning. The members of the advisory planning worked with my ministry and provided input into proposals for a discussion paper that was used in the public consultation sessions that took place between May and July of last year. As part of the consultation process, the discussion paper was posted on Ontario's Environmental Registry, and we received more than 300 responses. A separate process involving consultation with aboriginal communities and organizations is still ongoing.

The individuals, organizations, stakeholders and aboriginal representatives we heard from throughout the consultation process strongly supported improved legislation for species at risk. So we will continue to consult with interested groups and organizations as we develop guidelines and policies for implementation of the proposed legislation.

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If this legislation is passed, I also look forward to acting on one of the provisions that would allow establishment of a permanent advisory committee. I would make this a priority. This advisory committee is intended to represent a cross-section of interests and expertise, and would contribute to our objectives of greater accountability and transparency.

The committee's role would be to make recommendations to the Minister of Natural Resources on matters related to implementing the act. These matters would include development and delivery of stewardship programs, development and promotion of best management practices for protection and recovery, and development and delivery of public education and outreach programs. The committee would also advise on approaches that may be under the act to promote sustainable social and economic activities that assist in the protection or recovery of species.

One of the things we heard throughout the consultation process was that people want to be more involved and want to work together with us to proceed with the important task of recovering species at risk. Overwhelmingly, there was a demand for effective programs to support implementation of the act and a package of stewardship incentives that support landowners in their efforts to protect and recover species at risk. We are, subsequently, proceeding with a three-part approach to species recovery and protection: updated legislation, policies for implementation and enhanced stewardship programs. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of other provincial ministers in developing the proposed legislation. If this legislation is passed, I look forward to working co-operatively with other ministries and stakeholders as we move ahead with the implementation.

There are a number of provisions in the proposed legislation that would fundamentally change Ontario's

approach to implementing protection for species at risk. Right now in Ontario, no species is protected until the government decides to do so, and then regulates that species under the Endangered Species Act. This cumbersome process has been a hindrance to providing adequate species-at-risk protection.

By comparison, the new legislation stipulates that all species that have been scientifically assessed as being at risk would be protected automatically. This automatic protection would also be extended to their habitats.

This is what we call presumption of protection. It represents a very different approach and a very different starting point from the current act. From that starting point, another key difference between the two acts comes into play, and that difference is flexibility. Under the current act, once a species is regulated, the legislation allows no flexibility regarding how protection measures for that species are carried out. In many situations, this inflexibility has prevented the application of practical and sensible approaches that would benefit both the species and the landowners. By comparison, the proposed legislation would allow the government to consider a variety of factors in deciding how protection should be applied in individual cases and if exceptions should be made.

I'll give you a quick example of how this would work. One of the species protected under the Endangered Species Act is the butternut tree. A major reason the butternut tree is in danger is due to serious disease affecting the species. Under the terms of the existing act, a butternut tree cannot be cut down under any circumstances, even if it is diseased. Under the proposed act a landowner would be allowed to cut down a diseased butternut tree to prevent the spread of the disease and would be encouraged to plant a healthy one through stewardship incentives. You can see from this example how flexibility would remove current impediments to protection and recovery. It would also encourage and support greater and more effective stewardship by our private landowners.

The proposed legislation would also allow the government to make decisions that would accommodate compatible land use activities and, at the same time, support sustainable social and economic development. The goal would be an overall outcome that ultimately benefits the species and its habitat.

An example of this would be if a pit or quarry wants to expand its operations but, in doing so, would encroach on a habitat for an endangered species. The old act would not allow the expansion. The proposed act, though, would let us determine whether it's possible or feasible for the quarry owners to provide other adjacent land of equal or greater habitat value for the species in question in exchange for a permit to expand the operations. This could be a win-win for all of us.

If it turned out to be possible, the outcome would be a net gain for the habitat for that particular endangered species and an economic gain for the community. This is the kind of effective species-at-risk legislation that Ontario needs now: legislation that provides stronger and

better protection for our unique natural heritage and rich biodiversity and at the same time has the capacity and flexibility to take into consideration the social and economic needs and well-being of our citizens and all of our communities. Regardless of how we go about it, helping species to recover can be costly and complex. The best course of action is always to prevent species from declining in the first place through responsible land and stewardship practices.

Many of our province's species that need protection are found on private land. This makes voluntary stewardship activities essential and the primary approach to achieving any kind of success in reversing the rate of species decline that is now happening in Ontario. Stewardship is not just a responsibility for government. The agricultural community, rural landowners, the land use and resource management sectors, municipalities and the general public all have an important role to play in protecting and restoring our habitats. We already owe a great deal to the farmers and landowners who have been volunteering for years now to help with recovery programs on their lands. There are also many environmental, agricultural, business and community organizations that have voluntarily taken on important stewardship roles to protect essential habitat and green space.

We've made sure that the proposed legislation includes new provisions that would provide even stronger support and facilitation for private land stewardship. One of these provisions stipulates the creation of the species-at-risk-in-Ontario stewardship program to promote stewardship and other related activities. This program would recognize the leadership and contribution of landowners, the agricultural community, the land and resource use sectors, aboriginal people and the general public in the protection and recovery of species at risk. The stewardship program would work in conjunction with existing stewardship agencies and other partners. The program would support province-wide stewardship and recovery of species at risk, embrace new scientific information and be responsive to changing environmental, social and economic conditions.

As I stated in the House last week when presenting Bill 184 for first reading, the government proposes to back up this commitment to enhanced stewardship with funding of \$18 million over four years to support public stewardship efforts. A species-at-risk-in-Ontario stewardship fund would be established under the proposed legislation to promote public stewardship. The fund would provide incentives to landowners, farmers, aboriginal peoples, research institutions, industries, conservation organizations and many others to encourage activities that support the protection and recovery of these species at risk.

Ontario has had many successes regarding species protection and recovery. In 2006, we were pleased to announce progress in the recovery of both the peregrine falcon and the bald eagle. In the 1960s and 1970s, pesticide contamination nearly wiped out peregrines in Ontario and drastically reduced the provincial population

of bald eagles. The combination of bans on DDT and other pesticides and aggressive recovery efforts on the part of government staff and partners allowed both species to make significant recoveries. Local grassroots partnerships of volunteers, naturalist groups and corporations have also been a big part of our success to date in bringing back these species. In June 2006, the status of the peregrine falcon was changed from endangered to threatened, a lower-risk category. The status of the bald eagle in northern Ontario, where its recovery has been most significant, was changed from endangered to that of special concern, an even lower-risk category. The recovery of the bald eagle in southern Ontario is also well underway. Both of these species will continue to receive the protection they need to achieve further recovery under the proposed Endangered Species Act, 2007.

The wild turkey was once common in parts of southern Ontario but was extirpated in the early 1900s due to a combination of habitat laws and overharvesting. An Ontario restoration program was initiated in 1984 in co-operation with a number of stakeholder organizations. From 1984 to 1987, wild-caught birds were taken from several parts of the United States and released in southern Ontario. Populations were successfully established and have spread to other areas through both natural dispersal and trap-and-transfer operations. The wild turkey population is now thriving throughout much of southern Ontario and the provincial population of this species is now estimated to exceed 70,000 birds. These are tremendous success stories.

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The proposed Endangered Species Act, 2007, would give us the means to build on our achievements to date and continue to work with our conservation partners to ensure even greater accomplishments in the future. It would allow for compatible land use and recreational activities that in some cases would support further recovery efforts. There are more than 175 species in our province that need our attention and help, and it is up to us to act now and work to shorten that list before handing it over to the next generation.

The current Endangered Species Act is 36 years old. It is out of date, it is rigid and it doesn't provide the kinds of effective protection tools that we need in the 21st century. The proposed legislation this government is putting forward is the first step in a new era of species-at-risk protection for Ontario. We have the advantage today of a broad range of tools that we just didn't have in 1971. We have knowledge and technology that allow us to better understand the natural world and our impact upon it. We have concerned citizens who are eager to get involved in public stewardship initiatives. We are indeed fortunate to live in a province with such an abundance and variety of natural plants, animals and habitats.

As I said earlier, the people of Ontario deserve the benefits that come from conserving this unique natural heritage and our rich biodiversity. I believe we have succeeded in developing progressive, precedent-setting

legislation that would offer optimum protection for Ontario species at risk, while at the same time supporting the overall social and economic well-being of our citizens.

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to support Bill 184. Certainly, I want to commend the minister on his leadership on this bill. It was in 1971 that the Endangered Species Act was passed and it has not been updated since that time, as he indicated—36 long years. We need to do this for those habitats and species in this province and for future generations of Ontarians so that they can appreciate what is natural to this province.

So I'm pleased to rise in the House today to support the Minister of Natural Resources on second reading of Bill 184, the Endangered Species Act, 2007. By introducing this legislation, the McGuinty government is acting on its commitment to provide stronger and more effective protection and recovery measures for Ontario's native species at risk. In doing so, we recognize the direct link between a healthy, sustainable environment and a healthy, sustainable economy.

The time to take this action is long overdue, for many reasons that I will outline in my comments, and perhaps in the two-minute wrap-up I'll have an opportunity to also make comments on some of the feedback from various media and organizations throughout the province that have responded very positively to this piece of legislation.

First and foremost, Ontario's current Endangered Species Act is now 36 years old, and only 42 of more than 176 endangered species are protected. That gap is largely due to the cumbersome and inflexible process required by the existing legislation. During the extensive public consultation process to develop the proposed legislation, we heard general agreement that the existing act is rigid, outdated and limited in its scope in terms of the protection it affords species at risk and their habitat.

The current act is also out of step with the protection provided by other provinces and Ontario's commitment under the accord for the protection of species at risk in Canada. Ontario, along with other provinces and territories, signed the 1996 accord for the protection of species at risk in Canada and thereby committed to having an effective legislative framework to protect endangered and threatened species. This commitment has not yet been fulfilled. Most other provinces have updated or are updating their legislation for species at risk.

The federal Species at Risk Act came into full effect in 2004. While the federal act applies primarily to federal lands, it can be applied to provincial crown or private land if the federal minister determines that provincial laws and programs do not adequately provide for the protection and recovery of species at risk. As written, Ontario's current Endangered Species Act does not satisfy the national accord, and it may be argued that it is not consistent with the federal act at all.

As well as being outdated, Ontario's current act also allows no flexibility to accommodate social and eco-

conomic considerations or innovative solutions. For example, there is no allowance for the destruction or interference with the habitat of a protected species even if the final outcome would be for the overall benefit of the species in question. You've heard Minister Ramsay describe the situation where the current act prevents a landowner from cutting down a diseased butternut tree, as an example, even for the purpose of preventing the disease from spreading to healthy trees. This lack of flexibility has been a real impediment in achieving the necessary balance of protection and recovery of species within the context of sustainable development.

We anticipate that population of the greater Golden Horseshoe will increase from the current 7.5 million to 11.2 million over the next 25 years. Ontario needs species-at-risk legislation that would address that unprecedented growth here in Ontario and effectively complement existing provincial direction such as the provincial policy statement, the greenbelt plan and the Places to Grow Act, and to provide necessary stewardship tools to support their implementation.

In developing Bill 184, the government was mindful of a number of key challenges, and I just want to highlight some of those: first of all, the need to provide better protection measures for species and their habitat while at the same time allowing for the consideration of social and economic concerns; the need to create legislative provisions, policies and programs that take into account the views and interests of a wide range of partners and key stakeholders; the need to ensure a science-based process for determining which species are in fact at risk; the need to provide adequate resources and develop the necessary tools to implement effectively the proposed legislation; and finally, the need to engage the Ontario public, key partners and other stakeholders, all of whom have a shared interest and responsibility in the protection and recovery of species and their habitat.

The legislation being presented for second reading today successfully addresses each of those challenges. The proposed act also provides broad and effective protection for species and their habitat. It takes a practical approach and provides a number of tools that may allow compatible activities, particularly those that support protection and recovery.

A quick look at the highlights of the proposed legislation demonstrates the many strengths and advantages of the proposed legislation over the existing Endangered Species Act, so let me clarify a few of those differences as well. First of all, the proposed legislation includes a clear role for science. An independent, science-based body called the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario will assess information on species that may be at risk and determine the status of such species based on the best or current available scientific information. Once the committee has assessed the species as being at risk, the species will automatically be added to the species-at-risk-in-Ontario list.

There is also a new emphasis on recovery; not simply protection but recovery will be playing a greater role in

this piece of legislation. Under the proposed legislation, preparation of recovery strategies would be required for species identified as endangered or threatened. Similarly, management plans would be required for special-concern species.

As I have already mentioned, the proposed legislation incorporates a balanced approach that includes a degree of flexibility. The proposed legislation also allows cabinet to pass regulations that would limit protection or not apply protection in measures to a species or its habitat in certain circumstances. For example, under the proposed legislation, horticultural specimens of American ginseng, which is an endangered plant, would be excluded from protection under the act so that farmers cultivating this species would not require any further approvals or permits. We don't want to get mired down in bureaucratic red tape. We want to be able to do the right thing for these species that exist in Ontario. Without this exclusion, there could be challenges in accommodating the agricultural production of this plant, because the agricultural variety of ginseng is indistinguishable from the variety found in the wild, as an example.

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Another advantage of the proposed legislation is greater transparency and accountability. The legislation would require significant public reporting requirements, and the information to be made publicly available on an ongoing basis would include the following items: advance notice of species to be assessed by the committee; the species status reports from the committee; recovery strategies for species; and priorities for government actions to implement recovery plans and the use of flexibility tools. All would be available.

While stewardship is the focus, the bill contains a modern and comprehensive set of enforcement provisions that reflect the importance placed on the protection and recovery of species at risk and would ensure effective enforcement. These provisions would put this legislation on a par with other more recent provincial statutes.

It's also important that there is a recognition of the relationship of this legislation with aboriginal peoples in Ontario. The proposed legislation is mindful of aboriginal and treaty rights protected under the federal Constitution Act. In addition to a commitment to ongoing dialogue with aboriginal peoples as the new legislation is implemented, the proposed legislation includes provisions to help address aboriginal interests. It also recognizes the important role that aboriginal traditional knowledge can play in achieving protection and recovery of species at risk.

To ensure harmonization with other provincial processes, the proposed legislation would be factored in to all the planning processes we currently have in the province. In most cases, planning processes such as those under the Planning Act and the Crown Forest Sustainability Act already protect endangered or threatened species and their habitat. Let me reiterate that: The Planning Act and the Crown Forest Sustainability Act already

play a role in the protection of threatened or endangered species. This helps to codify, to update and to take some of those practices that are currently in place in Ontario and ensure that they are put into legislation so that we can more effectively address this issue.

In cases where additional approvals would otherwise be required, the proposed legislation would allow for regulations to be passed to facilitate harmonization of their approvals. Right now, Ontario lacks a workable framework and sufficient capacity for meaningful involvement of stakeholders in stewardship activities aimed at protecting and recovering species at risk. At the same time, we know that voluntary stewardship is essential to achieving success in reversing the current rate of species decline now taking place in the province and, in particular, in southern Ontario.

The new species-at-risk-in-Ontario stewardship program, which is part of the proposed legislation, would provide much-needed support and incentives for stewardship activities by landowners, resource users and conservation organizations. Within this program, a fund would be established to promote public stewardship. Activities that are eligible for support from the fund would include some of the following: education and outreach; habitat protection activities, including land acquisition of priority species-at-risk habitat and support to landowners as well; implementation of species-at-risk recovery plans, including habitat restoration; and finally, youth employment opportunities which provide work experience with species-at-risk stewardship.

In conclusion, for all of the reasons I have outlined, it is with great pride that I support this bill for second reading today. I would encourage members of the opposition parties who are here today to speak to this legislation and to support the bill as well. Bill 184 represents broader and more effective legislation, updated for the 21st century, that will protect and provide for the recovery of Ontario's species at risk and their habitats. By passing this legislation, we will ensure greater environmental, social and economic benefits for the people of Ontario today and in the future. We owe it to future generations to act now to update this legislation and support Bill 184. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): First of all, before we get to the specifics of this, I want to compliment the minister on his decision to allow the fish ladders to open up and allow the fish in southern Ontario, because of EHS, to move forward. That's going to make a lot of individuals very happy on that process.

In regard to Bill 184, there are some strong concerns out there from a number of groups and organizations that have contacted us which I'm sure the minister has heard. The fur industry is very concerned that the legislation will have substantial impacts on the trading of furs that are brought in from other jurisdictions in Ontario. For example, there's never been a badger that, to their knowledge, has been trapped and sold in any of the fur sales, but they come in from all around the world to buy furs

and in some—one particular group has about a \$250-million annual sale and they bring in badgers from other jurisdictions. Because they weren't contacted to discuss this issue, the concern is that badgers, wolverines and grey fox effectively will be eliminated. These people then start to question whether they should have those particular services in Ontario, and looking at moving it elsewhere is the discussions we're already having.

I met with Michael Power, from the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, who is extremely concerned with the impact of the legislation. The north has been hit substantially, and this may have other impacts as well. Other groups and organizations, such as the Canadian Outdoor Heritage Alliance and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, have some strong concerns.

Some of the key things—I think the minister needs to look at a couple things. The previous government protected more species at risk than any single government. The reason they were able to do that was because they pushed that issue. They went into cabinet and said, "This is what we're going to do." What you have to do is have the strength to go and do that.

Some other areas are the compensation for what takes place. There's that famous Jefferson salamander that showed up in the Aurora district and shut down construction for huge areas. Does this legislation mean there's going to have to be a species-at-risk study before any construction moves forward? What is the impact going to be and where's the compensation going to be? I look forward to debating this issue much later.

Mr. Peter Tabuns (Toronto–Danforth): I appreciate the opportunity to address the bill that has been put forward by the Minister of Natural Resources today. There were a number of comments made by himself and his parliamentary assistant on this bill. One of the comments that was made by the minister was that consultation with First Nations is ongoing. It would be very useful for members of this House to have an account of that discussion that's going on with First Nations. I know that my leader, Howard Hampton, will be addressing this issue in his comments, but I believe it is incumbent upon the minister to make it very clear to us who has been talked to, when, about what, and what the response has been. The First Nations in this province have legitimate concerns about any legislation that touches on their lands and interests. If they have not been properly consulted, that poses problems, certainly for them in the first place, but also for us.

I note that the proclamation date of this bill has been set for 2008. Again I would ask the minister and perhaps his parliamentary assistant to explain to this House why the bill will come into effect at such a late date. I understand the arguments that have been made about immediacy. The question then begs itself, why is the proclamation held over to that point?

Funding is touched on, and obviously I think there is general agreement in this House that if something is going to be saved for the good of society as a whole, then individuals should be supported. The question that the

minister needs to answer—and his parliamentary assistant—when he talks about this act is the scope of the funds, the source of the funds and the conditions under which they will be released or withheld. Those are substantive questions.

Lastly, in the act there's talk of coordination between this act and others. We need a sense of which acts will have primacy.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I am pleased to rise in support of the proposed Endangered Species Act, 2007, Bill 184. We've read much recently about climate change and the impacts that climate change can have on our environment. As our world's population increases and our consumerism impacts our environment more and more, more vigilance will be required if we are to reverse the rate of species decline in our province. I believe that is one of the objectives: to reduce the rate of species decline in our province.

The precautionary principle must be used. Proof is not always available that species are endangered. I believe the minister noted that the beautiful butternut tree is now in danger. Growing up on our farm along the Ottawa River, the butternut trees provided our family with bags and bags of butternuts every fall. It was a wonderful snack if one could learn not to hit the fingers but the nut with the hammer.

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As we, as a species, learn slowly how to live within the boundaries we must if our environment is to be sustained, change in legislation such as this is extremely important. Change in the legislation should impact our lifestyle so that we start living within the means and keeping our environment sustainable.

I support the proposed legislation and know it is a step forward. The protection of the diversity and beauty of Ontario is so important to us. We have a beautiful province. We must all work to make it better. That was one of the reasons I brought forward the Climate Change Awareness Day Act, a private member's bill. I think it's important that, as climate changes, we do invest more to make sure that our species exists.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise to address the Endangered Species Act update. I look forward to the comments of our hard-working and very able critic—the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka will be speaking at length on the bill momentarily—and his recommendations on behalf of the PC caucus.

I have a few issues I want to share with the Minister of Natural Resources, since his bill is on the table. At what we call Timbits with Tim, a community town hall we had in Mount Hope this past week, farmers came forward who wanted me to convey to the minister that the true endangered species in the province of Ontario is the Ontario farmer, and more respect should be shown for his or her habitat at the same time. They have concerns, obviously, with the way this bill may impact their livelihood. I will convey and support their request that assistance go along with this legislation to help farmers, or other landowners who may have to make changes to

the plans for their personal property, if their livelihood is impacted by an endangered species. I know this will be a topic of debate as this bill moves forward—hopefully through committee hearings at the same time. I do worry, on behalf of farmers in Glanbrook, upper Stoney Creek and Mount Hope. At the meeting in the riding of Erie–Lincoln, they came forward over and over again about the impact of McGuinty legislation on rural Ontario and the farmer.

I also want to convey again my request to the Minister of Natural Resources, as this bill is being debated, for some assistance in the spraying of gypsy moths in the community of West Lincoln and the west Niagara area. It's important to get moving on that. I think the Ministry of Natural Resources should contribute to that project. I hope, as well, that we'll see some finality when it comes to Marcy's Woods, which I had worked very hard, with support from my colleagues here in the Legislature, to save in the Fort Erie area. I'd like to get some permanent conservation of that piece of property.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Oraziotti: It's great to hear some of the feedback to date. I look forward to the opposition parties making their comments during their more lengthy opportunity to make comments. I want to hear what they have to say.

Has there been consultation on this bill? Absolutely. Do we need to do more work to talk to individuals and stakeholders out there in the province of Ontario to ensure that the policies and regulations developed in relation to this piece of legislation are done in an effective manner? Absolutely as well. And we will continue to do that.

But I think we need to be mindful of the fact that Bill 184 is a piece of legislation that will catapult us into the 21st century when it comes to dealing with the effects of climate change, urbanization and population growth in Ontario that are affecting species in the province.

There are a number of comments that I could read into the record. The list is fairly lengthy, but there are a couple of poignant comments that I might make.

"Conservation Ontario commends the government of Ontario for undertaking a review of the Endangered Species Act which will result in improved protection for species at risk." That is from the chair of Conservation Ontario.

Another comment, from Dr. Rick Smith, executive director, Environmental Defence: "The new Endangered Species Act is a significant step forward for Ontarians and the natural heritage we all value so highly. This new legislation will provide an inclusive, science-based and effective framework within which to balance different environmental and economic priorities."

There is a lengthy list. I have a package of media clippings following the introduction of the legislation. There seems to be widespread support across the province of Ontario for this particular piece of legislation. I think we all know that we need to do more in Ontario today to ensure that species are protected, and I look

forward to open and frank debate in the Legislature in the coming days and to additional consultations.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound—Muskoka): It's my pleasure to have the lead-off debate for the opposition on Bill 184, An Act to protect species at risk and to make related changes to other Acts. Before I start I'd like to thank my very capable intern, Eleni Tsoutsias, who has been working hard and extra hours preparing me for this debate. So thank you very much, Eleni.

It was 1971 when the government of Bill Davis introduced the first Endangered Species Act, and the then Minister of Lands and Forests was Rene Brunelle. Rene Brunelle, in his introduction to debate when the legislation was introduced, said, "Ontario is providing leadership in this kind of legislation in Canada, since ... no other province has similar legislation."

The PC Party appreciated the importance of preserving our species at risk when other jurisdictions had not even moved on this issue. We provided leadership and the legal protection of imperilled species. In their response to the bill, opposition members also understood the importance of the legislation and applauded the PC government on their work to protect species at risk.

Minister Brunelle recognized the significance of this legislation and anticipated its long-lasting effect. In his speech for the original legislation, Brunelle said, "The purpose of this bill is to provide for the conservation, protection, restoration and propagation of those species of animal and plant life which are in danger of becoming extinct. This bill will have a significant and far-reaching effect insofar as assisting in protecting and preserving our environment for us and those who will come after us."

Given our record on this issue and obvious interest in the protection and recovery of species at risk, the PC Party, under the leadership of John Tory, wants to see the act updated and is pleased to see that the government has finally moved to accomplish this.

There are several components of the bill that I support and would like to see implemented. I will briefly outline these, and further along in my speech I'll come back to them. I support:

- COSSARO, the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario, becoming the official species assessment body;

- that the committee and the classification process will be science-based and include aboriginal knowledge;

- the ability of the minister to enter into agreements, permits and other arrangements that will allow for activity that would otherwise be prohibited if it will achieve an overall benefit for the species;

- the emphasis on stewardship and improving habitat.

With respect to the definition of habitat and the process of protection in general, I support the process for developing regulations that can specify a particular habitat of a species to be protected.

I'm concerned with the amount of red tape that can result. It could end up being, on the ground, a very bureaucratic process as things develop.

I'm concerned with the lack of public consultation that went into the development of this bill. I know there have been postings on the Environmental Bill of Rights, but certainly I'm hearing from a lot of people, a lot of groups and individuals that are concerned—and I'll come to that a little later—that there hasn't been enough public consultation. This is of particular concern for many groups who are now calling on the government to provide meaningful public consultations on this bill.

I would like to remind the government about one of its election promises, election promise 152, which was, "We will make our institutions more democratic by freeing your MPP to represent you, mandating public consultation on all major legislation...." I would say that they would want to keep that promise, I'm sure. They also had promise 153, which was, "We will put the public interest ahead of special interests." So I'm looking forward to seeing this government keep those promises.

I'm concerned with the lack of funding in the Ministry of Natural Resources necessary to fully implement this legislation. I think it's common knowledge that the ministry is currently in a fiscal crisis that has been exacerbated by the recent 5% cut to the Ministry of Natural Resources budget. The minister may disagree with this, but when you pick up the budget and you look at what was actually spent in the Ministry of Natural Resources last year, it was \$762 million; the budget for this year is \$726 million. That's a \$36-million cut. I think he said that there were more forest fires last year than usual. I'm not sure how he knows how many forest fires there might be this year, but according to what was actually spent last year versus what is projected to be spent this year, there's a \$36-million cut.

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This bill, the Endangered Species Act, will have significant cost implications that the ministry will not be able to absorb. I hope I have time to go through and detail the financial crisis at MNR in the fish and wildlife program, as outlined by the past director, Andy Houser.

There is some money in this bill that goes towards stewardship: \$18 million over four years, so that's \$4.5 million per year. I would argue that it's not enough to support the programs and the staff necessary to see this legislation fully implemented, and that detailed look at the fish and wildlife program of the Ministry of Natural Resources, which is so important to provide the background inventories and work necessary to implement this—which I hope to go through in detail if I have enough time—shows that the Ministry of Natural Resources was, before this recent budget cut, some \$35 million short in the fish and wildlife program.

The bill has raised genuine concern among many groups throughout the province. These groups simply want to ensure that the legislation reflects the concerns of all stakeholders as best as possible prior to being passed. Anglers and hunters, farmers, foresters, fur managers, homebuilders, miners and waterpower producers are all calling for meaningful public consultations on this bill.

Jamie Lim, president of the Ontario Forest Industries Association, in a recent press release said, "It is absolutely essential that the Ontario public be meaningfully engaged in the review and improvement of this legislation."

Michael Power, president of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association and mayor of Greenstone—I note that one of our members commented that he'd been speaking with him, and I also spoke with him recently up north. He said, "The Ontario government has set the 'gold standard,' for species at risk, but accepted the tin standard on consultation"—obviously hoping for more input.

The reality is that this government failed to properly consult the public prior to introducing this bill in the House. There have been persistent calls on the government for increased public consultations by municipalities, industry, business, labour and First Nations groups. The government is in an apparent rush to have this legislation passed by the spring, and my response to the media following the press conference the minister did on this was that I think the government has visions that this is going to look very good on a glossy election brochure in the October 2003 election. But I would simply say that we need to take the time to do the proper consultation.

This, coupled with a lack of financial commitment for the implementation of this legislation, highlights that the protection of species at risk is not as important as this government, as Premier McGuinty would like to claim. The McGuinty Liberals simply aren't taking this issue seriously.

Lifelong health and quality of life depend on biodiversity, a rich diversity of wild plants, animals and habitats. We are fortunate to live in a province of rich biodiversity. Ontario is home to more than 15,000 species of animals and plants. Most species have stable populations, but some have declined or disappeared due to habitat loss, pollution, interactions with invasive species and over-harvesting.

Currently, of the 176 animals and plants in Ontario that have been determined to be at risk, 10 are extirpated—extirpated, for those who aren't familiar, means that they're still somewhere in the world but not in Ontario—76 are endangered, 45 are threatened, and 45 are of special concern. If their decline continues, these species and their associated benefits may disappear from the province. Updating this legislation is important to better protect our species at risk.

I would now like to go back to the bill itself and more thoroughly run through sections of the bill that I support and also some of those sections that I have particular concerns for.

The general purposes of the bill that are identified in the introduction of the bill include:

"1. To identify species at risk based on the best available scientific information, including information obtained from community knowledge and aboriginal traditional knowledge.

"2. To protect species that are at risk and their habitats, and to promote the recovery of species that are at risk."

Both of these points, I support. I support using the best available science so that the COSSARO committee determines whether a species is one of those five classifications I mentioned based on science, not based on politics. So that, I very much support. I support promoting recovery of species and I support stewardship. So I'm in general agreement with the bill's intended purposes. I support the review of this legislation with these stated and intended purposes.

I strongly support the proposal to have members of the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario be persons who have relevant expertise from a scientific discipline and/or aboriginal traditional knowledge. I support the committee being required to assess and classify species and to report these classifications to the responsible minister. It is important that classifications by the committee be based on the best available scientific information, and that is, in my books, peer-reviewed science. The bill explicitly states that this process should be based on science.

I'm concerned, however, with the lack of inclusion of those who will be most affected by this listing process in the assessment stage. Landowners and farmers are significant partners in the protection of species at risk through stewardship initiatives. They understand the species and their habitats. They have first-hand experience. However, the average Ontarian has no role in the committee that is to become the legal species assessment body.

Furthermore, there is no appeal mechanism of any sort available to the public, specifically landowners, for classifications of particular species. The minister is the only one with the power of reconsideration. The minister alone can require the committee to reconsider its classification of a particular species if he or she feels that this classification is not appropriate. I should add that, from the briefing I had this morning with the Ministry of Natural Resources, I have learned there is as well another advisory committee, the Endangered Species Act advisory committee, that they may implement. I would suggest they should definitely implement this committee and that those who have an interest—and that would include farmers and foresters and environmental groups—should be represented on that committee.

I will now move to protection and recovery of species. With respect to the section that deals with the protection and recovery of species, the bill prohibits damaging or destroying the habitat of the species. Upon being listed, the habitat of a species is automatically protected, and that's similar to the past legislation. In this automatic protection process, "habitat" is defined as "an area on which the species depends, directly or indirectly, to carry on its life processes." Species-specific habitat protection can be developed through regulation within one year of the listing stage for endangered species or two years for threatened species.

I support the process that is proposed in the bill. However, there is concern with the amount of red tape that can result from the process in the bill in general. In theory, this sounds great, but on the ground I'm concerned about how it's going to affect the individual property owner and those trying to carry out business, whether it becomes very much too bureaucratic and filled with red tape.

The bill also allows for agreements, permits and other instruments. The bill allows for the minister to enter into agreements or issue permits that would authorize a person to engage in an activity that would otherwise be prohibited by the legislation. That's where this bill is different from the one that was introduced in 1971. In 1971, if a species was on the endangered list, that was it. Now there is more flexibility built into it. So these agreements, permits or other instruments can be brought into effect if there is an overall benefit for the affected species. I think the minister gave an example where a tree may be on the endangered list, but it's on the list because it's diseased, and in that case it actually makes sense to cut down the diseased tree if you can improve the habitat and plant more of the trees in another location.

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If "the activity will result in a significant social or economic benefit to Ontario": The minister can actually approve an activity that would hurt a species at risk in cases where there would be an activity that would hurt social and economic activity in the province. We can only hope that this process will be both transparent and accountable, ensuring that all potential parties are given equal opportunity to enter into agreements with the minister or receive permits enabling them to engage in activities that would otherwise be prohibited under this bill.

I'd like to now talk about enforcement. The bill also includes enforcement measures, and designated enforcement officers include conservation officers. While conservation officers are best suited for the job, they will not be able to fully enforce this bill. Conservation officers are currently dealing with chronic underfunding, and I will come to that later on. I've already mentioned how the fish and wildlife program is some \$35 million short in its funding. It has been virtually impossible for them to do their job, without the added strains that this legislation will place on them. We've heard also how conservation officers are holding bake sales and bottle drives in order to raise money to supplement their operational funds, how they don't have enough gas for their trucks and how they're stuck in their offices as a result of that.

I'd now like to talk about the penalty section of this bill. There are significant penalties. The bill provides stronger penalties for violations of the legislation. Fines and jail time have been stiffened, depending on the number of offences. Under this bill, a person who attempts to do anything that would be an offence is guilty of that offence. However, the bill states that a due-diligence defence shall still apply. There is a concern among constituents, many of whom have written to me—I think they're wrong in this—with the removal of the require-

ment for the crown to prove wilful intent, which was part of the original legislation. They are concerned that this will contribute to hostility and counterproductive activities for most groups who could otherwise be partners in this legislation. However, since a due-diligence defence remains available in this bill, persons charged with an offence under the act who sincerely did not know they were committing an offence are still provided with a defence.

Now I'd like to talk a little bit about stewardship. Landowner stewardship has been recognized in the legislation with provision for conservation easements and tax incentives. The Minister of Natural Resources may make grants to promote stewardship activities and assist in the protection and recovery of species at risk and their habitat, but there is no mention of compensation. That means that farmers and landowners stand to lose significant revenue if a species that is listed as extirpated, endangered or threatened is found on their land. Preserving the species' habitat, whatever that habitat may be, could likely mean a loss of crops or other products, in addition to the possible loss of grazing land. The bill promises enforcement measures without ensuring that proper and fair compensation for landowners is also built into the bill itself. Society as a whole benefits from the protection of species at risk. Individual landowners should not be expected to pay entirely for the costs of a policy that benefits all society.

On March 26, the Sudbury Star published an editorial on this topic that cautioned of the losses that farmers and landowners stand to face as a direct result of this legislation, and I'll quote from the Sudbury Star:

"Many farmers simply will not have the funds to pay for any new governmental regulations.

"Burdening them with more rules and no money to pay for them would be an injustice to the very group that keeps food on the tables of Canadians.

"In fact, taking the time to find out what farmers and landowners would need to compensate for lost land or income would be more cost-effective for the government than prosecuting people for violations."

There's no real hope for the compensation of farmers and landowners because of the budgetary concerns facing the Ministry of Natural Resources. As I mentioned, Minister Ramsay has committed \$4.5 million a year over four years, or \$18 million in funding, to help promote stewardship activities protecting essential habitat and green space. My question would be, is this totally new money or is it going to go to those existing stewardship organizations that already have other activities that may also be facing a financial crunch? But \$18 million over four years is not sufficient to promote stewardship initiatives, and certainly not enough to fully implement this bill in its entirety. Stewardship initiatives alone would require at least \$10 million annually to implement.

Now I'd like to talk about public consultation, because that is probably the concern that has been raised the most in both newspaper articles and media reports, and also in e-mails to me. The article in the Sudbury Star concludes

with a plea to this government to properly consult with agriculture and land groups. All the groups concerned with this legislation are asking the government to invest the time in public consultations. They simply want to be properly consulted on this bill. They do not oppose this legislation; they support, as I do, its general principles and what it sets out to accomplish. However, it is important that you don't ignore the calls made by interested groups for your government to engage in meaningful public consultations. I would say to the government that from what I've heard, they want to pass this legislation before the Legislature rises sometime in the spring, and I would simply commit and be more than happy to participate in any public consultations around the province whenever the government can organize it. If that means it's every day over the course of constituency week, mid-May, I would be more than happy to travel around the province, northeastern and northwestern Ontario, southeast, southwest, and of course in Toronto. I'd be happy to do public consultations on Fridays in Toronto as well. So I am more than happy to participate in those public consultations.

Minister Ramsay announced the review of the Endangered Species Act on May 9, 2006. At the same time, a discussion paper outlining each of the proposals was posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry for a 60-day period, allowing for public comment. In May 2006, the ministry promised to engage in consultations with the public, stakeholders and aboriginal peoples to help determine what measures are necessary for the protection and recovery of species at risk. Less than a year after the start of the review process, the government has now introduced the bill. As a contrast, the federal government spent some six years crafting their legislation and receiving feedback from the various stakeholders, and they are still struggling with the legal requirements of the legislation. This bill is an important piece of legislation that cannot be rushed through. Proper time and effort must be spent consulting with the various stakeholders on this bill.

The McGuinty government claims that it consulted extensively with the public, aboriginal organizations and a wide variety of stakeholder groups before drafting the legislation. They claim that these groups include land developers, environmentalists, rural communities, fish and wildlife enthusiasts, municipalities and resource industry sectors. However, it is these same groups the McGuinty government claims to have consulted with who are currently concerned about what they consider to be a lack of meaningful consultations on this bill with the people who are going to be most affected by its intended purposes.

The Ontario Forestry Coalition, which is comprised of industry, municipal, business, labour and First Nation leaders, has renewed calls for meaningful public consultations on the proposed legislation. In a recent press release, Thunder Bay mayor Lynn Peterson echoed the sentiments of mayors across Ontario, speaking also as a representative of the Ontario Forestry Coalition. Mayor

Peterson said, "No one is opposing a Species at Risk Act, but we want to ensure the legislation will be designed in a manner that will ensure protection for species at risk and do so without needless sacrifice of jobs and prosperity."

I would simply like to add that if you've been to Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario and a good part of the north, the economy is struggling. The forest industry has been faced with unprecedented shutdowns of mills across northern Ontario and there is a lot of office space and retail space sitting idle in the beautiful city of Thunder Bay. So I'm sure that they're concerned about anything that might affect their economy there.

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Many other groups throughout the province have similar concerns with this bill. A broad range of resource stewardship and development organizations are also urging the McGuinty Liberals to invest the required time and effort in engaging the Ontario public in a review of the proposed legislation. Representatives of the Ontario Forest Industry Association, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Ontario Fur Managers Federation, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Waterpower Association all agree: It is absolutely essential that the public be meaningfully engaged in the review of this legislation. This legislation is much too important to rush through the House. I'm not familiar with all the concerns of these groups, but I think that's why it's important that there be these public consultations.

These concerns remain and have the potential to negatively impact communities throughout Ontario, communities the McGuinty government has not consulted with and is currently ignoring. Municipalities across the province are passing resolutions and issuing letters to Premier McGuinty urging broader public consultations, particularly with the communities that could be seriously impacted by the used legislation. Minister, these groups are not opposing the legislation. They have the same intentions that you claim to have with respect to this legislation. They simply want to ensure that the legislation works to protect species at risk and their habitats while at the same time ensuring that the legislation is in fact more flexible and streamlined than the legislation it is proposing to replace. There is still an opportunity for this government to do the right thing and have public consultations on this bill. We know that the government has set some records for the number of promises broken, so you don't want to break another one: promise 152, mandating public consultations on all major legislation. There is a need to get input from communities that are going to be most affected by this legislation.

In the time I have, I would like to put on the record some of the concerns that I've heard from individual groups and from some of the media reports. A press release which was released on March 26 is from a number of different groups: the Ontario Forest Industry Association, Ontario Fur Managers Federation, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Ontario Waterpower Asso-

ciation, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association, Ontario Mining Association and Ontario Lumber Manufacturers' Association. I just want to get their concerns on the record.

March 26: "Species at Risk Legislation Too Important to Rush. Extensive Public Consultation Required to Ensure Effective Act."

"March 26, 2007, Toronto. A broad array of resource stewardship and development organizations is urging the provincial government to invest the required time and effort in engaging the Ontario public in a review of the proposed species-at-risk legislation. Minister of Natural Resources, David Ramsay, introduced Bill 184, the Endangered Species Act, 2007, last week, with a 30-day public comment period and expressed an intent to have the bill passed during the spring 2007 session of the Legislature.

"This act will have direct implication for people, communities and industries across the province," said Jamie Lim, president of the Ontario Forest Industry Association. "It is absolutely essential that the Ontario public be meaningfully engaged in the review and improvement of the legislation."

"Healthy fish and wildlife—conservation of biodiversity—is our mandate. We are restoration specialists," says Dr. Terry Quinney, provincial manager of fish and wildlife services for the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. "But we are still trying to obtain from the government the information necessary to determine if this new act will best lead to actual recovery of endangered species."

"The new act is intended to update and replace the existing legislative framework originally introduced in 1971. It is the government's response to an advisory panel report tabled in August 2006. The bill provides the public with the first opportunity to consider and assess the government's approach to enshrining a conceptual framework in law. The bill is scheduled for second reading this Wednesday, March 28.

"Our members will need time and the opportunity for direct dialogue," said Conrad Morin, president of the Ontario Fur Managers Federation. "I am very disappointed that there is no plan for consultation on the bill before it proceeds to second reading."

"Paul Misteale, vice-president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, agrees. 'A fast-track approach to this legislation will not give us the ability to inform and involve the thousands of farmers who may be affected. It is imperative that the government put the emphasis on engagement, not expedience.'

"The spectrum of interests in support of a reasoned and diligent approach to public consultation on the bill includes anglers and hunters, farmers, foresters, fur managers, home builders, miners and water power producers.

"I sincerely hope that government will provide for full committee review and hearings," said Neil Rodgers, vice-president of the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association—Urban Development Institute. "The govern-

ment should undertake a comprehensive and province-wide approach to consultation given the importance of this legislation to stakeholders and all Ontarians."

"If the past is any indication, the new legislation will be with us for decades," offered Paul Norris, president of the Ontario Waterpower Association. "Given that reality, it is more important to get this legislation right than it is to get it right now."

"Collectively, members of the resource stewardship organizations generate economic activity in Ontario that supports more than a million jobs. They are 'on the land' across northern and southern Ontario and operate in rural and urban environments. They are responsible for implementing sustainable resource management practices and stewardship on a daily basis."

I wanted to get as many of the organizations that had done this press release on the record. Many of them are northern organizations. I know the minister is from the north, and the parliamentary assistant is the representative for Sault Ste. Marie, so I know they'd be concerned about allowing the north and others to have a voice in this legislation.

I see the Minister of Northern Development and Mines sitting opposite, and I'm sure he feels the same way; that he'd want to have the people in Sudbury have a voice in this new endangered species legislation.

In fact, I have before me an article from the Sudbury Star of March 26: "Land Rights Key in Endangered Species Act."

"There can be little doubt in anyone's mind of the need to save, preserve and protect Ontario's wildlife.

"The Endangered Species Act, introduced 36 years ago, is no longer cutting it. Ontario is now home to 175 different species—far more animals are in trouble or threatened with extinction than when the original act was drafted.

"The peregrine falcon, woodland caribou, bald eagle, barn owl, wolverine and cougar are just a few of the species now considered at risk.

"No one wants to see any animal or plant vanish from our forests or fields and the new species at risk legislation is an attempt to update the old law, which is no longer working.

"If it becomes law, the province will spend \$18 million over four years to enhance protection for the habitat of threatened animals. The proposed legislation will increase the number of protected animals in Ontario and help scientists determine which new species should be added each year.

"While the legislation is necessary, it still could fall short in one area.

"Landowner stewardship has been recognized in the legislation with conservation easements and tax incentives, but there is no mention of compensation.

"Farmers and landowners stand to lose revenue if an endangered species is found on their land. Preserving the species' habitat could likely mean a loss of crops or other products as well as grazing land.

"The government must learn its lesson from its mistakes when the original Endangered Species Act was introduced in 1971. The law was all about strict enforcement with no compensation for landowners built into the act.

"Farmers already have a raft of requirements they must meet to stay in business from water regulations to feed regulations and vaccination rules, to name a few. Many farmers simply will not have the funds to pay for any new governmental regulations.

"Burdening them with more rules and no money to pay for them would be an injustice to the very group that keeps food on the tables of Canadians.

"In fact, taking the time to find out what farmers and landowners would need to compensate for lost land or income would be more cost-effective for the government than prosecuting people for violations.

"The act is not law yet—the government still has time to consult with agriculture and landowner groups.

"That is the only way to ensure that species-at-risk legislation will become a law that produces results in a way that is fair and equitable to those whose land the animals might be found."

So that's another request for consultation.

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Another comment, in the Ottawa Citizen: "Being Kind to Animals"

"Seizing the green moment, Premier Dalton McGuinty's government is strengthening Ontario's Endangered Species Act. This is opportunism of the best kind."

It goes on to say, talking about the way species are selected—"It also takes the overt politics out of deciding whether a species is threatened—an expert panel will make the call. That's good: The question of which species are in trouble should be answered by scientists. The government should only decide what to do about it.

"The new law gives government more flexibility to make land swaps, impose partial restrictions, or reach other compromises with private owners of endangered animals' habitat. Having these options is better than harsh restrictions that encourage landowners to hide evidence of threatened species on their properties.

"That said, the \$18-million fund promised for stewardship projects seems scant. Landowners deserve due compensation for surrendering their land rights to the public good.

"Still, a flexible law that protects troubled species before they reach the brink is a great improvement. Expect Mr. McGuinty to make a fuss about it before this October's election,...

"What do you think?"

So it's more or less what I was saying before, that I think Mr. McGuinty wants to see this bill on the glossy election brochure that will make it look like the Liberal Party is interested in green activities. But if they are, why are they not providing the necessary funds? As I mentioned before, maybe this is a good opportunity, if

they want to allow enough time for it to go through some of the concerns in the fish and wildlife program.

I had the pleasure of attending the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters conference that was just recently held, and I have to say I was extremely impressed by all the work the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters are doing. The executive director, Mike Reader, put on a couple-hour presentation going through all the various activities that they are involved with, and it's simply amazing to see the many stewardship activities they are involved with. Mind you, some of them they've taken on because the government has not been doing their job. For example, in fish stocking, the government was all set to close the Ringwood fish hatchery, which is very important for stocking salmon and, I believe, trout in southern Ontario, and luckily the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters stepped up to the plate and has now taken over running the Ringwood fish hatchery. Had they not done that—it's pretty close to downtown Toronto; it's about a half-hour drive from downtown Toronto—it probably would have been gobbled up by developers and developed in a flash, had the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters not stepped up to take up responsibilities that previously the Minister of Natural Resources had been involved with.

Before I look at the fish and wildlife program in detail, though, there's one other article I'd like to just quote a couple bits from, because it's from my riding. It emphasizes the lack of funding for the fish and wildlife program, particularly for conservation officers, the same conservations officers who would be called upon to implement and enforce this new Endangered Species Act.

This article was in the Parry Sound North Star on March 21, written by Sarah Bissonette, with the headline: "MNR Officers Stuck Doing Desk Duty"

"Parry Sound—Critics worry conservation officers forced to spend more and more time behind their desks will put area fish and wildlife at risk."

I won't go through the whole article, but reading down a few quotes:

"According to internal documents obtained by the Parry Sound North Star, last year ministry staff weren't allowed to travel without permission unless responding to tips called in or to attend preset events like court dates. The Parry Sound area's three conservation officers were also limited to a combined nine tanks of gas a week.

"The document went on to say any other expenses—vehicle repairs, supply purchases or equipment—would mean even less money to fill gas tanks.

"You see, COs aren't going out, because the budget has been reduced, they can't afford to put gas in the trucks," said Parry Sound District Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) president Mark McKernon when asked about cutbacks. 'COs know their job. They need to be funded properly to do their job.'

"When Jim Poirier started as conservation officer with the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) over 30 years ago, he parked his work truck in his driveway and left at all times of the day and night to do his job. By the time

he retired in 2004, vehicles had to be kept at the office and today, budget restrictions make it even harder for officers to leave the office.”

That’s an excellent article, written by Sarah Bissonette, that goes on at length, but with the time I have, I won’t go through it. It emphasizes, though, how conservation officers are stuck in their offices not able to do their job. Of course, we just had a budget with further reductions in the Ministry of Natural Resources.

I will now go through part of the presentation that was made by Andy Houser, the past director of the fish and wildlife program for the Ministry of Natural Resources, to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters very recently—I won’t go through the whole thing. It starts: “Fish and Wildlife—An Enormously Valuable Public Trust.

“Foundation of major sectors of the economy, of communities, of ways of life.

“Essential to environmental, social and economic well-being.

“Essential to the wellness of both individuals and society.

“Government is the custodian of this trust....

“Over 6.7 million of Ontario’s 12.3 million residents ...

“Are involved in appreciation or use of fish and wildlife resources.

“Economic contribution more than \$6.2 billion annually.

“The spinoff economic benefits are huge.

“Fish and wildlife resources are also an important source of non-monetary wealth for society, be it cultural, quality of life or peace of mind.

“Resource management is essential to the continued provision of the benefits.

“Funding for fish and wildlife management is an indicator of the government’s real commitment to the environment and human wellness.”

I spoke about the government wanting to get this legislation passed this spring and looking forward to having it on their election brochures. As this statement makes clear, funding for the fish and wildlife program is a measure of the government’s commitment to environment and human wellness.

“Funding for fish and wildlife is an indicator of their real understanding of the importance of a healthy environment.”

He goes on to point out: “A sound fish and wildlife program requires \$120 million annually (in 2006 dollars).

“In 2006-07, however, the base fish and wildlife program budget was” actually only “\$70.57 million.” So a big shortfall.

He goes through in detail, analyzing what has been happening with this special-purpose account and the general funding—consolidated revenue funding—of the fish and wildlife program. He goes on about the special-purposes account—that’s the money from all the fishing and hunting licences and fees that goes into the Ministry of Natural Resources: “The SPA contribution in 2006-07

represents 87.5% of base program funding and over 70% of total program funding.” So just about all the funding for this program is coming from fees that are paid by people who fish or hunt.

“In 2002-03 the SPA contribution was 78% of base program funding and 67% of total funding.

“In the 1997-98 work plan, the SPA contribution was in the order of 61% of base program funding.

“Between 2002-03 and 2006-07, the CRF contribution”—that’s from the general funds of the government—“to base program funding decreased by almost 36% from \$15.7 million to \$10.05 million.

“The contribution from the special-purposes account increased from \$55.6 million to \$60 million....

“Despite public assertions, the fish and wildlife program was not flatlined in 2006-07”—the Minister of Natural Resources let people believe that in the last year it was flatlined. Mr. Houser goes on to point out that it wasn’t actually flatlined. When you look through the numbers in detail, it was actually a 6% decrease. He says,

“In fact, the program suffered a significant (6%) decrease in base funding as it entered the 2006-07 fiscal year (decrease from \$74.29 million to \$70.57 million)....

“The reductions mean that:

“In 2006-07, the base fish and wildlife program (at \$70.57 million) was lower than it was in 2002-03 (\$71.3 million) in real dollars,” this despite the Premier’s election commitment to adequately fund the fish and wildlife program of the Ministry of Natural Resources. He made that promise in writing to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

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The decreased consolidated revenue fund contribution comes “despite growing public interest in the protection of biodiversity, ecosystem integrity and the achievement of sustainability....

“It comes despite:

“The government’s commitment to ‘developing Ontario’s economic advantage, and a healthy lifestyle includes activity in the great outdoors’ and”—here’s the commitment that the Premier made—“the Premier’s commitment to the OFAH in May 2003 to ‘give the MNR the resources it needs to once again properly manage Ontario’s fish and wildlife.’”

So there’s the Premier’s very definite commitment, the promise he made in the last election, one of many that has been broken.

“Within the reduced allocation, the ministry must absorb inflationary cost increases related to salary awards, rising energy costs and other cost increases.

“The 2006-07 base budget of \$70.57 million translates into only \$61 million in 2002-03 dollars—an overall 13% decrease in spending power.

“But, since the impacts must be met through operating dollars, the reduction effectively results in a 35% decrease in operational spending power.” So this has the real effect of reducing operational spending by 35%.

“In the ministry’s northeastern region base operating dollars decreased by 23.6% in 2006-07....

"Base funding for the Great Lakes and fish hatchery programs decreased by just over 15% entering the 2006-07 fiscal year. This included a 12% decrease in salaries and a 20% decrease in operational dollars.

"The real impact on operational program funding between 2005-06 and 2006-07 for the Great Lakes and hatchery programs is therefore over 40% and closer to 56%.

"This doesn't include the ... impact of the 75% reduction in COA funding."

As he points out, "The implications of the above are significant.

"Dollars, not ecology, have driven the number of ecological zones for fisheries management.

"Essential inventory"—this is very critical for this new species-at-risk legislation—"assessment and science on representative or 'type' systems has not, and cannot be done.

"Critical inventory and assessment to allow appropriate variations within zones to reflect differing pressures and conditions cannot be carried out.

"Rehabilitation and restoration efforts are significantly compromised.

"Adequate enforcement is not being carried out.

"Great emphasis is being placed upon the creation of local stewardship councils.

"But decisions made in the absence of sound information and science are still decisions made in ignorance, regardless of who makes them."

The consequences of inadequate management: "Degradation of ecosystem integrity and impacts on human health.

"Increased risk e.g. loss of stability and diversity.

"Substantial reductions in allowable harvests....

"Meanwhile the government is creating new endangered species legislation that has major delivery and costing implications."

So here we have Mr. Houser, the past director of the fish and wildlife program, going through in detail showing how the government promised to adequately fund the fish and wildlife program, how currently they're some \$35 million short of funding for this fish and wildlife program and how a lot of base work is just not being done, a lot of the inventory work is just not being done, yet the government is moving ahead with new legislation when it's not adequately able to do its existing work.

He goes on and makes some pretty clear statements here:

"It is expecting a bankrupt ministry to deliver this program"—the species-at-risk program—"on the back of an infrastructure the funding for which depends upon angling and hunting licence revenues.

"But, it is doing nothing to grow those revenues and is decreasing CRF contributions."

He talks about the future of fisheries: "The future of fisheries management rests in the hands of local zone councils but:

"Ministry technical committees have no funding to meet special advisory committees like BGMAC and OMBAAC.

"Ministry scientists must use vacation time if they want to publicly present the results of their research.

"Local zone and stewardship councils do not replace the need for a sound infrastructure and funding."

He goes on: "The 'base' fish and wildlife program requires a major infusion of dollars to allow 'project dollars' to be stabilized and increased and thereby to allow sound resource management activities to be carried out directly by the ministry or through partners.

"But don't look elsewhere in MNR. It's bankrupt."

He goes on to say in conclusion, "A healthy environment equals healthy people and a healthy economy.

"Properly funding the fish and wildlife program would be one of the best investments that could be made for the future of our natural resources and health as a people."

I would point out that I skipped through that presentation. I was able to be there in person at the OFAH conference when it was made. I would simply say that it is available to the public on the OFAH website in its entirety. He's done a very detailed analysis of the fish and wildlife program. What he's found is that there's a \$35-million shortage in funding. This is really a statement of how seriously this government is looking after our natural resources. Obviously, they haven't taken it that seriously and now we're undertaking new legislation, so how are they going to be able to properly put that into effect?

In the few minutes I have left, I would now like to also add some comments—some positive, some negative—to do with the new legislation.

There's an article in the Simcoe Reformer: "Rare Badger Could Finally Get Help It Needs; Revamped Endangered Species Act Pledges Money, Better Protection." However, the article points out, "'But dollars are in short supply to implement a strategy,' he told the Reformer"—so once again coming back to the funding issue.

There's an article in the Peterborough Examiner commenting, "Tough Decisions Ahead for Saving Species:

"The rush to a motherhood move like improving SAR legislation has been almost unseemly. Ten months from review to table. That's blindingly fast for a 21st-century government. It is difficult not to see this haste as a desperate McGuinty leap to board the environmental bandwagon....

"If the pundits are right, climate change and warming will make the decisions about the survival of species at risk for at least the next couple of decades."

It talks a bit about climate change concerns: "If the climate heats up by a couple of degrees over the next decade protecting them might be really tricky." And that's certainly a consideration.

In the Kingston Whig-Standard, an article that is mainly supportive of the new legislation: "New Endangered Species Bill in a Class By Itself, Advocates

Say; Law Would Be the 'Gold Standard' for Other Provinces."

In the Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal—certainly the Liberal members from Thunder Bay might want to read this one—from the Saturday, March 24 paper: "Communities At Risk Need Protection Too:

"We hate to sound like a broken record but red flags have gone up again with the Liberal government's species-at-risk legislation. Legislation that is aimed at protecting vulnerable animals and plant species across the province, could unduly restrict logging and mining activities and further jeopardize communities in crisis in the north."

Whether that is true, that's certainly a concern out there, as is illustrated by this article. That's why there should be consultations in Thunder Bay. As I pointed out, I'm happy to go there to be a part of them.

1700

"Northern Ontario municipal, industry and union leaders called for more consultation on the new Endangered Species Act to ensure it is realistic and feasible to implement in the northern Ontario landscape. They maintain the province failed to consult properly with them on the proposed legislation introduced in the Legislature on Tuesday, and that the Endangered Species Act could spell more trouble for the beleaguered forestry industry.

"Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association president Michael Power can't understand the big rush here.

"Let's see what's in it ... (and) ensure there is a commitment to consultation."

"No one is saying that species at risk shouldn't be protected, but let's ensure that the fix fits the problem. We already have too many communities 'at risk' of economic devastation because of mill closures and downsizing. Overdoing species protection could further harm them.

"Look what happened with the province's Living Legacy of parks ... and more ... protected areas."

I think actually Mike Harris should get credit for the increased parks protection and increased protected areas, as he made the biggest increase in the province's history.

"The Ontario Forest Industry Association has warned that the act could lead to immediate and indefinite moratoriums on any resource-based activity, and could add more red tape for a forest industry already in crisis. Broad swaths of crown land could suddenly be off limits to a vast array of activities, the group said.

"As well, farmers' fields and food production could be halted; the door could be slammed on housing developments," and it goes on. Obviously there's concern there. They want to be heard; they want to be consulted.

There's another article in the Simcoe Reformer: "Species at Risk Plan Not Perfect, but a Good Start." It goes on to say, "The \$18 million will not be nearly enough to correct the damage we have done but it is a good start. The law may not be perfect, but the longer it is debated without action, the worse" it gets.

Windsor Star: "Species Act Won't Impede Building: Proposed Bill Offers Flexibility."

In wrapping up, I would just like to say that I'm supportive of the new species-at-risk act. I believe that probably one of the biggest concerns is whether it's going to be properly funded to actually do anything, and of course there's been a cry for consultation. I'm certainly happy, as the representative of the PC Party, to be involved in and to sit in on public consultations wherever they may occur. As much as I'd like to get to my constituency in the May constituency week, I'm happy to spend the entire constituency week travelling around the province to Thunder Bay and Timmins or wherever committee hearings are set up—to Windsor and Ottawa. The Minister of Northern Development and Mines is saying, "and in Sudbury." I'm more than happy to spend that entire week doing consultations and to participate in consultations on Fridays, when the Legislature is not sitting.

I think that on the surface the new act is an improvement. I like the fact that the list of endangered species will be very much science-based. I like the flexibility that's built in and the consideration for socio-economic effects, and I like the emphasis on stewardship. I hope there will be some sort of compensation for landowners, and perhaps an appeal for landowners who find themselves affected by this legislation.

The PC Party will be supporting this legislation, but we will be asking for consultations. I'm sure the northern members in the Liberal Party particularly, who I'm sure have been hearing from many of their constituents, will want to participate in those public consultations so that we can get this very important legislation passed and also make sure it works on the ground and doesn't create new bureaucracy and new red tape for those people involved in the forestry sector or farmers or others who may be involved in economic activities.

As was the case in 1971, when the PC government of Bill Davis and Minister of Lands and Forests Rene Brunelle passed that legislation and the opposition at that time supported it, I believe the opposition—I can speak for the PC Party—will be supporting this legislation. They will be pushing, though, for those full and public consultations, and I will look forward to participating in those full public consultations.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): It's my pleasure to make a few comments on the speech made by the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka regarding Bill 184, An Act to protect species at risk and to make related changes to other Acts.

I must begin by commending the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka for a very thorough review of this bill. His talk reflected not only on some of the areas that he found to be something he could support, but also, of course, on some of the difficulties with the bill, particularly around the consultation, or lack thereof, that has taken place in regard to this important piece of legislation.

I think anyone who was watching this from home will know that the member took some time to talk about

everything from the penalties that are ingrained in this bill to the stewardship and compensation issues in this bill. Some considerable time was spent not only on the deficit of consultation but on the very stakeholders who feel that their voices have not been adequately brought to the table in regard to making sure that if this legislation goes forward, it is in fact the best legislation we can possibly get for the province of Ontario.

He also spoke very definitively about some of the failures of this current government to maintain existing systems that are in place to protect wildlife, particularly referring to the lack of funding, the lack of attention financially and of resourcing being given through the MNR to conservation officers and the fact that they can't do their job well enough at this point in time, as well as deficits with fish and wildlife funding, a some \$35-million shortfall. So let's get serious about what we have in place already and let's make anything we're going to be putting in place the best it can be.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I am just delighted to speak to this important bill, and I want to thank the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka for indicating that he and his entire caucus will support it.

This legislation launches a new era of natural heritage protection in our province. One of the pieces of this legislation is a new species at risk in Ontario stewardship program that will provide \$18 million over four years to organizations—volunteer organizations primarily—that monitor our species in Ontario.

One of those organizations that might be included is called Bird Studies Canada. Some 17,500 citizen scientists monitor birds and animals and habitats through Bird Studies Canada. I want to talk a little bit about one of them. It's called the marsh monitoring program, and, as you would expect, they monitor marshes.

On Sunday morning, I had the pleasure of actually going to a marsh in London, the Sifton bog, and I was listening for some frogs. I was listening for chorus frogs and wood frogs, and I'm sorry to report that as of Sunday there were no chorus frogs or wood frogs. There were deer, there were mallards, there were Canada geese, but no frogs yet. I suspect they're quite lively now. These species are a very important indicator of water quality and of loss of habitat. Unless there are volunteers out there counting these things, we won't know what's happening to these important species. So it's important that we support the volunteers, it's important that more volunteers do it, and I'm delighted about that particular aspect of this legislation.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I'm very pleased to offer a few comments on this bill, and particularly to echo the sentiments of the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

I think one of the parts to this bill that really requires very careful consideration is the question of the carrot-and-stick approach. We know that the bill has implied in it the need for enforcement measures. At the same time, there's a recognition of the importance of education and

stewardship, and I characterize these two things as the carrot and the stick.

1710

I think most people do not knowingly do the wrong thing. There is an ever-growing body of science that allows us to better understand things like wildlife habitat, the kinds of degradation that have taken place and the effects on it. In most cases, those have been things that no one ever thought about, no one ever thought were wrong, and so I would suggest that, in looking at this bill, first of all it needs consultation. When you consider that the federal government has taken six years and has worked on a number of areas, it seems to me that it's very important to have consultation. It's also important as a principle to keep in mind that what we're talking about is a societal good, and a societal good obviously should be paid for by society, not individual landowners.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I was here to listen to all of the words and all of the contribution of the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, and I want to congratulate him on a very thorough canvassing of a number of the issues related to this proposed legislation. It's obvious he's done a lot of homework; it's obvious that he has also talked to a number of organizations and a number of people about what is in the legislation, what is not in the legislation, and what the issues are that need to be examined.

I was particularly struck by his comments about the underfunding of the Ministry of Natural Resources, and I commend him for bringing this forward, because I suspect that a majority of people across Ontario do not know that the very government ministry which is charged with trying to conserve and protect our natural environment has been chronically underfunded by the McGuinty government. In fact, go from district office to district office in the Ministry of Natural Resources, and they are so restricted that many of the biologists and the technicians who are charged with protecting and conserving our wildlife cannot leave the office because they simply do not have any budget to go out in the field.

This reminds me of the situation which happened in the United States under Ronald Reagan. Mr. Reagan as President was quite willing to pass very tough legislation for the Environmental Protection Agency in that country and then completely short-fund the Environmental Protection Agency so that it couldn't enforce any of the legislation. I fear we're on the verge of that in Ontario today.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Miller: Thank you to the members for Kenora-Rainy River, Hamilton East, York North and London North Centre for their comments.

As the member for Kenora-Rainy River very clearly pointed out, this government has not been funding the Ministry of Natural Resources properly, as was pointed out by Andy Houser's presentation that he made to the OFAH. So I would say, if you're serious about protecting our natural resources, show me the money. You know,

you look at the budget, and according to the budget papers, the actual money spent last year in the Ministry of Natural Resources was \$762 million, and the plan for this year is \$726 million. I'll be looking forward to getting the government to remove the extraordinary fire costs they claim were in there, but it's very clear that in the first three and a half years the government's been in power, they haven't kept this promise they made in writing to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters to properly fund the fish and wildlife program. In fact, the member from London North Centre was talking about supporting volunteers and stewardship. Yes, I agree with that. Then how come I had to ask questions of the minister last spring about the community fisheries and wildlife involvement program to stop him from cutting \$500,000 from the \$1-million budget? That's a program that supports some 35,000 volunteers across the province, probably doing many, many millions of dollars of stewardship work across the province.

One of the first acts the new minister did was to close the Frost centre. I think they realize they made a bad mistake on that one, but that was one of the first actions they made.

The Conservative caucus will be supporting this bill. We'll be looking for some consultations on it and we'll try to improve the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Hampton: I'm pleased, on behalf of New Democrats, to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 184, An Act to protect species at risk and to make related changes to other Acts. I will be using the full hour to speak to a number of issues related to the bill.

First of all, let me preface my comments by saying that no one wants to see the extinction of species in Ontario. No one wants to see species of plants and animals disappear from Ontario's landscape. Everyone across Ontario is interested in being able to sustain Ontario's existing plant and animal species. Similarly, there is a recognition that there are significant problems with the existing endangered species legislation and processes in the province. So there are important issues that need to be examined and debated in relation to this bill.

If this legislation is to live up to the billing that the minister has given it, it will need to meet a number of significant tests. One of the tests it will have to meet is its impact on First Nations and its impact on aboriginal rights, treaty rights, and the traditional activities of aboriginal communities on the land, particularly across northern Ontario, where aboriginal people in many geographic locations are the only people living on the land and close to the land. I must say that I have been asked specifically by a number of First Nation representatives to address this issue in some detail because they believe that First Nations have been left out of this process almost entirely. So I want to examine that situation.

Before I do, though, it is important to note that the Supreme Court of Canada over the last 20 years has set out a number of legal and constitutional tests that

legislation, regulations or other government action must meet if the legislation, regulation or other government action is to have the force of law, not to mention any legitimacy or credibility with First Nations.

I want to quote Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice McLachlin in the Taku River decision of 2004, where the Chief Justice says, "The crown's duty to consult and accommodate aboriginal peoples, even prior to proof of asserted aboriginal rights and title, is grounded in the principle of the honour of the crown, which derives from the crown's assertion of sovereignty in the face of prior aboriginal occupation."

The Chief Justice makes a very important point in this decision. She raises the issue, when does the crown's responsibility arise? When must the crown do this? She sets it out very specifically. She says, "It arises when a crown actor has knowledge, real or constructive, of the potential existence of the aboriginal right or title and contemplates conduct that might adversely affect it."

Who would the crown actor be in this case? It would be the Minister of Natural Resources. What would the activity be? Well, in this case, it is legislation which everyone in this chamber agrees would have a significant, if not substantial, impact on what activities could or could not be undertaken on land and water in Ontario, when they could be undertaken and under what restrictions they could be undertaken.

1720

Of course, could aboriginal people potentially be adversely affected? I don't think there would be any disagreement with people here that aboriginal people, especially north of the 50th parallel in northern Ontario, the largest geographic expanse in the province—where hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering continue to be fundamental to the framework of society, fundamental activities that are undertaken on an everyday basis.

The Supreme Court of Canada sets out the test of when the crown's duty to consult and accommodate aboriginal people arises. I don't think there would be any doubt among anyone here in the Legislature today that this legislation would have to meet this test; at first blush I don't think anyone could deny that.

Now, there are a number of other decisions taken by the Supreme Court of Canada which elaborate upon the duty of the crown, and I think they are important in the current context as well.

One of the other decisions—this is from the Haida Nation and the government of British Columbia. "The Supreme Court of Canada has confirmed that both the provincial and federal governments have a duty to consult and, where circumstances warrant, accommodate First Nations before taking actions that may affect their asserted aboriginal" or treaty "rights. This duty is grounded in the principle of the honour of the crown, which applies to all of [a government's] dealings with aboriginal peoples."

One of the other decisions also points out—this is the Taku River decision: "The duty to consult is not dependent on a First Nation obtaining a court declaration

of their aboriginal rights and title. The fact that a First Nation has not established their rights in court does not mean that the rights are nonexistent." It goes on to point out, "Since section 35 protects aboriginal and treaty rights already existing under the common law, the crown is required to consult First Nations about those rights without requiring that the First Nation first go to court and establish their rights in court." As I said, that is the Taku River Tlingi First Nation decision against the province of British Columbia.

The decisions also point out that governments have a duty to do some other specific things. In the Adams case, "the Supreme Court of Canada held that Parliament—or Legislatures—"cannot adopt an unstructured discretionary administrative regime which risks infringing aboriginal rights, in the absence of specific guidance." Indeed, "If a statute confers an administrative discretion which may carry significant consequences for the exercise of an aboriginal right, the statute or its delegate regulations must outline specific criteria for the granting or refusal of that discretion which seek to accommodate the existence of aboriginal rights. In the absence of such specific guidance, the statute will fail to provide representatives of the crown with sufficient directives to fulfill their fiduciary duties and the statute will be found to represent an infringement of aboriginal rights under the Sparrow test."

So in bringing forward legislation it's very clear that there are a number of requirements that a government must meet if they hope to have that legislation pass constitutional and legal tests.

The court has also spoken on what a government must do in terms of consultation with First Nations. This again is the Taku River Tlingit First Nation against the government of British Columbia decision, which says that a public consultation process is not sufficient to discharge the government's constitutional duty of consultation. In other words, going out and saying, "Well, we talked to the farmers and we talked to the fishermen and we talked to some municipalities. And, oh yes, we talked for one day or two days with a First Nation," that kind of general consultation process is not sufficient to discharge the government's constitutional duty of consultation. In fact, a distinct consultation process with affected First Nations is required if the legislation, regulation or government action is to pass the constitutional test. The Supreme Court of Canada has been very specific about the kinds of tests that legislation needs to meet.

The government has actually published some draft guidelines on consultation because the McGuinty government got into real trouble not long ago because it failed to consult with First Nations. I want to read some from that decision because it is very informative. What it pointed out is that neither the Minister of Natural Resources, who is here and spoke earlier today, nor the Minister of Mines met his constitutional and legal obligations. The case I'm talking about is the case of Platinex Inc., which is a mining exploration company, against Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation. This is a

decision of 2006. What happened is that, basically, the McGuinty government thought that they could ignore First Nations interests and rights, could give a mining exploration permit to a mining company and this mining company could go into First Nations territory and begin drilling holes and conducting mining exploration, and the interests of the First Nation could be totally ignored by the McGuinty government. The First Nation was able to go to court and point out that there had been no consultation by the McGuinty government; in fact, the McGuinty government had virtually ignored the concerns of the First Nation. So the judge hearing the case issued a restraining order, restraining the mining company from continuing its exploration activities due to a failure of the provincial crown to consult with the aboriginal community in the area.

Also interesting are the comments, the very strongly worded comments, of the judge in respect of the McGuinty government. The court commented that Ontario ignored its fiduciary role despite the "repeated judicial messages" since the Sparrow decision of 1990. The judge stated that "this case sadly reveals that the provincial crown has not heard or comprehended this message and has failed in fulfilling this" constitutional "obligation" and this constitutional duty. This decision was just issued last year, 2006—the failure of the McGuinty government in this respect.

1730

So the McGuinty government has been forced by the courts to now issue some draft guidelines after their failure to consult with First Nations. I want to read from some of these guidelines because, again, one would hope that the McGuinty government would not come here today and present legislation without meeting its own draft guidelines. Their draft guidelines say, "The principles that will influence the development of our final consultation guidelines are:

—"Respect for all aboriginal peoples living in Ontario

—"A commitment to meeting Ontario's constitutional obligations to consult aboriginal peoples

—"The development of effective and efficient consultation processes

—"Aboriginal participation...."

That's what the McGuinty government says on their own consultation process.

Their guidelines say—again I'm reading from the government's own draft guidelines—"When does the crown have a duty to consult aboriginal peoples?"

The answer is, "The crown has the duty to consult with aboriginal peoples when the following conditions occur:

—"The crown has knowledge, real or constructive, of the existence, or potential existence, of an aboriginal right or treaty right and

—"The crown contemplates conduct that might adversely affect the right in question."

That is when the crown must consult.

As I've already pointed out, and people would accept, aboriginal people living across northern Ontario, north of

the 50th parallel, probably live more closely to the land or live on the land more so than the vast majority of Ontarians. In fact, you can say that the day-to-day existence of these First Nation communities is intimately linked to the land.

The guidelines also refer to, "What must the crown do to fulfill the duty to consult." And it says—again, this is what the McGuinty government is saying for itself—"The duty to consult generally has both information and response components.

"The level and extent of a ministry's consultation with an aboriginal community"—notice that it's not talking about consultation with a bureaucrat somewhere or somebody who is, say, a consultant to the chiefs of Ontario—"will depend on the particular circumstances; the consultation activities to be undertaken and how they are approached will vary.

"Some of the activities the consultation process may include are:

"—Providing information on the proposed project or government decision to the aboriginal community

"—Obtaining information on potentially affected rights

"—Listening to any concerns raised by the aboriginal community

"—Attempting to minimize adverse impacts on aboriginal and treaty rights."

This is all under the decision of Madam Chief Justice McLachlin, where she says, "Consultation must be meaningful." It must be real and it must be meaningful.

The guidelines then say, "What is the role of aboriginal communities in the consultation process?" Notice again that the government's own guidelines don't refer to consulting with a bureaucrat who works for an aboriginal organization; the government's own guidelines say "aboriginal communities." This is the test the government has set out for itself.

It says, "As aboriginal rights and treaty rights are collective rights, ministries must undertake consultations with aboriginal communities. The communities in question must possess or assert constitutionally protected aboriginal rights or treaty rights which may be adversely affected by the government's proposed actions or decisions." The key part here is that the government must consult actual aboriginal communities. So that is certainly important.

The guidelines then say, "There are a number of questions that ministries should consider when developing their consultation approaches. These questions include:

"—Which aboriginal communities should be consulted?

"—Where are these aboriginal communities located?

"—Who are the appropriate representatives of the aboriginal communities for the purposes of the consultation?

"—What information does the ministry need to obtain through consultation?

"—What information does the ministry need to provide affected aboriginal communities?

"—How will this information be shared with affected aboriginal communities?

"—How will concerns raised in the consultation process be addressed?

"—What are the time frames of the consultation? Are they adequate to provide meaningful opportunities to respond and provide input?" Remember, the Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice said that consultation must be meaningful.

"—Will additional resources be needed to facilitate the consultation?" And so on.

So the government sets out a number of tests for itself. Then it says:

"Involving aboriginal communities:

"In developing its consultation approach, a ministry should carefully consider the perspectives of the aboriginal community or communities to be consulted.

"In some instances, ministries may need to have discussions with the affected aboriginal community or communities to determine what processes or approaches should be used to consult with the communities. This will frequently be the case with larger projects that have the potential for broader impacts on aboriginal rights or treaty rights."

I could go on at some length—and I probably will come back to some of these because they're very interesting—to set out a number of the other tests that must be met.

For my purposes now, I want to ask these questions. These are the tests. They are set out by the Supreme Court of Canada. They are also set out in the government's own draft guidelines for consultation with First Nations when it comes to government legislation, regulations or other government action. These are the tests which any legislation must meet if it is to have any constitutional validity, any legal validity, not to mention credibility and legitimacy with First Nations.

The question is, what, if any, of these tests has the McGuinty government met with this important legislation? I raise again, because the issue needs to be examined: Would there be a duty to consult in this case? I say again, no one could be closer to the land, no one's livelihood and existence could be more closely dependent upon the land in a very immediate sense than the everyday livelihood and existence of aboriginal people who live in communities north of the 50th parallel. In many of these communities—most—hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering is very much part of their essential everyday activity. It is part of the spiritual life, it is part of the tradition, it is part of the ongoing life and continuity of the community. As I say, virtually the whole of First Nations' livelihood is based upon these traditional activities that are protected by section 35 of the Constitution and have been the subject of many numbers of Supreme Court of Canada decisions.

So is there a duty on the McGuinty government to consult in this context? I don't think anyone would debate that. Because of the relatively broad and possibly deep impacts of this legislation, there is clearly a duty on

the McGuinty government to consult with First Nations. When did that duty arise? I think it would have constructively arisen even as the government sat down to think about this legislation, and certainly when the government authored the legislation and presented it here in the Legislature. The duty to consult had already arisen.

The next question is, has there been consultation with individual First Nation communities that will potentially be affected? In this respect, I want to refer to an ad I heard on the radio the other day. It was one of these quasi-promotional ads by the government or by somebody the government has a relationship with saying that this will enable the McGuinty government to protect polar bears, to protect woodland caribou and also species like the wolverine. I found the ad interesting because the ad doesn't refer to species that you might find in southern Ontario or central Ontario or eastern Ontario or western Ontario; the ad very specifically refers to species that you would find north of the 50th parallel. It very specifically refers to species that you would find in a part of Ontario where there are virtually no non-native people. You might find the odd non-native pilot flying around in an airplane, you might find a non-aboriginal nurse working in a nursing station, and you might find a non-aboriginal teacher teaching in a school, but 99.99% of the people who live near the habitat or in the habitat of polar bears, wolverines and woodland caribou are aboriginal people. So this ad is obviously telling the public that this bill is about protecting species that are within the traditional lands of the aboriginal people who live in the far north.

1740

The one place where you'll find polar bears in Ontario is near Fort Severn First Nation. Fort Severn First Nation is almost right on the coast of Hudson Bay. In fact, when you fly in to that remote First Nation, you very often have to fly out over Hudson Bay to come in and make the landing. Depending upon the time of year when you go there, you will see polar bears, if not in the community, certainly adjacent to the community.

Since this ad specifically says, "Oh, this is going to make it easier to protect the polar bears," I wanted to know if the community at Fort Severn had been consulted, as is the constitutional legal requirement placed on the government and the requirement the government places on itself in its own guidelines.

I have to say to you that as of today I have not been able to find any evidence whatsoever that the McGuinty government has met its constitutional and legal duty and its own requirements as set out in its consultation guidelines to meet and consult with the people of Fort Severn First Nation, of that community.

I next turned my thoughts to the wolverines. I actually remember, a couple of years ago, being in Sandy Lake First Nation and meeting a university professor who was in Sandy Lake doing studies of wolverine habitat and wolverine populations. We had a very interesting discussion that night about the wolverines.

Since a claim is made in this ad that this is going to protect the habitat of wolverines, I thought, "I wonder if the people, the communities, of Sandy Lake First Nation,

Sachigo Lake First Nation, Kee-Way-Win First Nation, Poplar Hill First Nation, Deer Lake First Nation, Pikangikum First Nation"—these are all communities that are along the border of Manitoba and Ontario, far north of the 51st parallel—"I wonder if the McGuinty government has met their constitutional and legal obligation to consult with these First Nations or if the McGuinty government has even met its own self-proclaimed guideline requirements to consult with these First Nations."

So, again, I sent out an inquiry. I regret to say that, as of today, there is no evidence that the McGuinty government has met its constitutional and legal requirements to consult with those First Nations either.

The next thing I turned to was, of course, the woodland caribou. The woodland caribou is an interesting species. I've seen a number of video clips showing them in the wild, north of the 50th parallel in northern Ontario. I've actually had the opportunity to see some herds from time to time, although they are very difficult—you have to be very watchful. So I thought of those communities that I have been to where they acknowledge, "Yes, from time to time we see evidence or see herds of woodland caribou." I thought again of the Pikangikum First Nation; I thought of North Spirit Lake First Nation; I thought of Cat Lake First Nation; I thought of the new Slate Falls First Nation; I thought of the Fort Hope First Nation and Webequie First Nation and Summer Beaver First Nation. I thought also of a couple of the other First Nations who might—Whitewater Lake First Nation. I thought to myself, since this ad specifically refers to woodland caribou, I wonder if the McGuinty government has met their constitutional and legal obligation to consult with these First Nations. So I made contact, and I regret to say that here, as we are debating this legislation, there is no evidence that the McGuinty government has met their constitutional duty, their legal duty, nor the standard set out under their own draft guidelines to consult with those First Nations either.

I must say I was incredulous when I heard this. I couldn't believe it. But that is where it stands. So I made further inquiries, because I wanted to find out what is going on here. One would think that if the McGuinty government were very serious about this legislation, it would have canvassed the constitutional and legal requirements, that it would also have canvassed its own requirements as set out in its consultation guidelines, and that it would have met these guidelines, or at least there would be some evidence that the government has met these guidelines. I regret to say that so far I have not been able to uncover any evidence that these constitutional and legal requirements have been met.

I want to again go back to some of the decisions, because they are so important. After all, we're not just dealing with convenience here; we are dealing with decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada which say this is the law. This is not a matter of convenience; this is a question of, is the McGuinty government going to obey the law or not? That's the issue.

Interjection.

Mr. Hampton: One of my colleagues here says we should probably hear from David Caplan on this, the minister who sees nothing, hears nothing, knows nothing when literally hundreds of people across Ontario are being fleeced out of millions of dollars in a corrupt lottery system, and the minister says, "Me, know the law? No, I don't know what the law is. Me, know anything about the incidents that are happening? No, I don't know anything about that. Did I see anything? Did I hear anything? No, I was happy to sleep," while literally hundreds of Ontarians were fleeced out of hundreds of millions of dollars under the McGuinty government.

I want to go back to the Endangered Species Act, because this is very, very important. Again, I want to refer to the Haida Nation decision, which says it is the province, the provincial government, that has a duty to consult. The provincial government cannot delegate this constitutional and legal responsibility to someone else. It cannot hire Warren Kinsella as a consultant and tell him, "Go out and spin a story about how we've consulted with First Nations." It is the legal and constitutional requirement, it is the law, that it is the provincial government that must consult.

Secondly, the government cannot say—I repeat this once again, because this was very clear in the Taku River decision. The McGuinty government cannot say, "Well, you know, we had a meeting with a First Nations rep, we had a meeting with a trapper and we had a meeting with one of the wildlife organizations—and there was the consultation." The Taku River decision is very clear: A public consultation process is not sufficient to discharge the government's constitutional duty of consultation. A distinct consultation process with an affected First Nation is required.

1750

I next tried to ascertain, if individual First Nations who might be affected have not been consulted, what has the government done? I contacted tribal organizations—there are number of tribal organizations. You have the Northern Chiefs tribal organization, and Fort Severn First Nation is part of the Northern Chiefs tribal organization. I ascertained to see if there had been any consultation with the Northern Chiefs. What did I find at this point in time? No evidence of consultation.

You can contact the Matawa Chiefs' Council. The Matawa Chiefs represent a number of First Nations who intersect with what might be woodland caribou habitat. At this time, has there been any consultation with the Matawa First Nations tribal council? I regret to say that at this time there is no evidence of that.

Windigo Tribal Council, which again represents a number of First Nations—their geographic location would roughly intersect with potential caribou habitat—have they been consulted? No.

So I eventually went to the grand chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Who is the Nishnawbe Aski Nation? Well, Nishnawbe Aski Nation represents all of the First Nations, all of the Cree and Oji-Cree First Nations. To

generalize, basically they occupy the landscape north of the 50th parallel of latitude in Ontario.

I met with Grand Chief Stan Beardy and Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, and I asked them, "Has there been any consultation with Nishnawbe Aski Nation? Has there been any consultation with you?" I regret to say that there has not been any consultation even with the NAN organization.

So the McGuinty government says they have consulted with First Nations. I tried to ascertain, where has this consultation taken place? What I was told is that there may have been some discussion—not consultation—there may have been some discussion between Ministry of Natural Resources personnel and a bureaucrat who works for the Chiefs of Ontario. That may have happened. But on the face of it, that does not meet this government's constitutional and legal responsibilities. It doesn't even meet the watered-down guidelines that the McGuinty government has put forward itself for consultations with First Nations. It is not consultation. To put it this way, it's the kind of thing that someone like Warren Kinsella would put out as a spin line when the McGuinty government says, "Warren, we need your political advice and your political action here." It's the kind of spin line that might be put out.

Why is this important? It is important because the legislation itself, any administrative bodies that the legislation might seek to create, any regulations that the legislation might seek to empower or might seek to give capacity to, is wide open to constitutional and legal challenge, not by one First Nation organization but, I would argue on the face of it, by a number of First Nations across the breadth of Ontario.

I say to myself, if a government were serious about this legislation, if a government said, "This is important legislation. It addresses important issues, and it's important that these issues be addressed," if the government were serious about that, wouldn't the government have done its homework? Would not the government of the day have done its homework and met its constitutional and legal requirements in order to present the legislation, in order for it to have constitutional and legal validity and in order for it to have any currency and legitimacy with people who are without doubt going to be affected by this legislation in the general sense and by measures that might happen under this legislation in a specific sense? That, to me, seems to be elementary. It just seems to me that if I were a minister, before I came into the Legislature, I would ensure that this has been done. I would ensure that this has happened, that this is carried on.

Speaker, I know it's almost 6 of the clock. I intend to take some time later on, but I want to make this point: I think the government's got a problem. The decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada say that just having a general consultation—"Hi, Bill, how are you? Good to see you, Warren"—will not do, that there must be specific consultation and accommodation with First Nations who potentially could be affected. There needs to be a specific consultation process.

I don't know what the government intends to do, but I would say to the government, the fact that they have not done their homework heretofore could be fatal to this legislation, fatal to any regulations enacted or attempted to be enacted under this legislation and fatal to any administrative or quasi-administrative tribunals which might be part of or potentially part of this legislation. I would hope to hear from either the minister or his parliamentary secretary about what the McGuinty government's plan is to remedy a very serious problem that

they themselves have created by their apparent failure to even do the most elementary of homework.

I note that it is almost 6 of the clock. I will resume my efforts on this legislation on another day, but I now move adjournment of the debate for today, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House stands recessed until 6:45 this evening.

The House adjourned at 1758.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 28 March 2007

Mercredi 28 mars 2007

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 28 March 2007

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 28 mars 2007

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROVINCIAL ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT, 2007

LOI DE 2007 SUR L'INTERVENANT PROVINCIAL EN FAVEUR DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 20, 2007, on the motion for second reading of Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth / Projet de loi 165, Loi visant à créer la charge d'intervenant provincial en faveur des enfants et des jeunes et à y pourvoir.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Be prepared. Today, we have the 219th Boy Scout troop from Toronto. This is the 100th anniversary of the founding of scouting by Lord Baden-Powell. So welcome to troop 219.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Welcome. The Chair would like to know sometime, and perhaps you could find out: Do they still call it Boy Scouts?

Interjections: Scouts.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll find that out sometime. Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Not only is this troop 219, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. They are based at All Saints Church. Although they can't of course participate in the debate, and I don't want to cause them any grief, the general scouting movement is broad-based and has both women and men in it, which is why we call it the scouting movement. I got a nod in the affirmative. Nobody, of course, broke any rules.

Look, it's interesting: Here's a group of bright young people, obviously committed members of an outstanding movement—I should tell you that I was a Boy Scout. Before that, I was a Wolf Cub.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Dave Levac was a Queen's Scout.

Mr. Kormos: Dave Levac was a Boy Scout.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): A Queen's Scout.

Mr. Kormos: Would all the members who were Boy Scouts just raise their hands—all the members who were

in the scouting movement? There you go. And I don't want that to discourage anyone.

Interjection: It's too late.

Mr. Kormos: Undoubtedly, there are women here who were involved in Girl Guides and Brownies, which was the counterpart. It's an exciting movement, and all of us in our given communities are proud to be very supportive. I know that down where I come from in Niagara, young women and men in the scouting movement are front and centre, not only as members of their troop but in community activities, working with seniors and working with other young people at community events.

We are indeed debating second reading—not inappropriately, in view of the audience we have present in the gallery—of the creation of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

First, let me make it very clear that New Democrats are supportive of the proposition that this role is one of an officer of the assembly. That is critical. I am pleased to be able to tell you, Speaker, that over the course of several years now—is it you, Mr. Colle, or is it me who is causing them to leave?—we have developed, amongst all caucuses here at Queen's Park, an effective process when it comes to making decisions about people who are to be appointed officers of the assembly. There has been a process that has developed and has become the norm, the pattern whereby there is selection by consensus—in this instance, with all three parties. It's a process that has worked well. We are in the course of exercising it in terms of the selection, for instance, of the Integrity Commissioner. New Democrats look forward to being able to participate in that process in terms of the selection of a Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

1850

It remains, however, that the scope of his or her duties is very bare-bones in terms of the statute as it exists and then to be expanded based on regulation. In any event, it remains that the advocate may receive complaints, act on complaints, but may not act for young people in court, for instance, and has the requirement to give some specific advocacy to children in the wardship, custody or care of family and children services, as well as young people—children—who are in the custody or under the care of the correctional system, the ministry of correctional services. That's kids in custody—secure or unsecured custody.

One can't speak about the need for advocacy without speaking to the need for the sort of things that the advocate will undoubtedly be burdened with in short

order: children's mental health services and the shortage of resources in that area across the province. But I tell you that in Niagara there is a critical and dangerous shortage. The Niagara Centre for Youth Care, which is the single institution—and my colleague from St. Catharines, Mr. Bradley, knows full well what I speak of—handles a huge caseload with an incredible backlog and is constantly struggling to provide what I'll call those mere core services, never mind embarking on any special projects that situations, be they persistent or unique, would call upon them to do.

I suppose while we're discussing this bill, Bill 165, in the context and in the shadow of last week's budget, one has to note and bemoan the fact that there was sparse mention given to kids and kids' needs, especially mental health needs, in the last budget.

This isn't a partisan issue. Down where I come from, Niagara region, we've got people from all three political parties representing constituents. Tim Hudak represents the riding of Erie-Lincoln, and of course he is here tonight as well. When Mr. Hudak speaks to this bill—if his caucus gives him the opportunity—he may well join me in assuring you that there's a crisis in Niagara—a crisis, we tell you—around funding for children's mental health services.

The cost of not providing those services is tremendous. Kids who fall between the cracks, kids whose families do their best, families working hard, if they are working—you see, you have to look at all social factors that add to the turmoil and the strife that generate the crises. You can't talk about mental health without talking about joblessness and the pressure that puts on workers and their families and their community and the children of those families.

You can't talk about mental health without talking about the critical need for adequate funding for special needs in our educational system. We had folks here yesterday from OSSTF, didn't we? Dan Peat came up from Niagara region, along with teachers from Port Colborne and Niagara Falls. One of the things that was at the top of their list—let's be very clear, this isn't going to put anything in OSSTF's pocket. But they talk about the critical need in terms of special-needs kids—right, Mr. Hudak? You were there—the waiting list for assessments and the fact that if a family has, catch this, \$24,000, they can jump the line, because that's what it costs for a private assessment.

So you can't talk about kids, advocacy for kids, you can't talk about the mental health and well-being of children, without talking about the crisis in our educational system when it comes to addressing the needs of special-needs kids. Because it starts with the very basic, very fundamental assessment. Assessments aren't getting done. When assessments aren't getting done, programs aren't being designed, staff aren't being allocated. And then you've got the whole problem that when there are assessments, they don't have the money to implement the programs. They don't have the staff to designate them, to

attach them to a youngster, a young person, a child with these special needs.

Something as simple as this Boy Scout troop that was here—because you know that across this province, traditional public facilities, schools amongst them, are increasingly pressured, pressed, to charge user fees for groups like the Boy Scouts, or Scouting in general—I should be very clear about that; members of the Scouting movement—or Air Cadets or Navy Cadets or Army cadets. Any of those organizations are being increasingly hard pressed, notwithstanding some modest relief that was given them, because of the increased need for schools to charge for their services because those boards aren't being adequately financed. So you tell me: What good does it do kids when programs like Scouting or Air Cadets or Sea Cadets or Army Cadets don't have homes to operate out of and can't operate because without those homes, they can't function? Tell me what that means for kids.

Tell me what it means for hard-cash-strapped municipalities like the places I come from, places like Port Colborne and Wainfleet and Welland and Thorold and Pelham and St. Catharines. Tell me what it means when those municipalities have to cut back on recreational programs. Tell me what it means when user fees in hockey rinks and arenas have to rise.

I was over at the Welland Minor Hockey House on Sunday because it was Lena Stuart's 85th birthday. As I told Lena and the huge crowd that was gathered there, Lena Stuart—she was a Villella originally. Everybody knows the family. She was the baby of the family, the youngest child, the daughter. And all her siblings—Fee is gone now; all the Villellas are gone. She now lives in the old Villella homestead on Patsy Avenue down in the south end, in Crowland. She lives in the old homestead with her son, Gordie Stuart. Gordie is extremely active in minor hockey.

So we were at the Welland Minor Hockey House for Lena Stuart's 85th birthday. You talk about kids—Lena was the sort of person whose door was always open. She would adopt stray kids; she would adopt her children's friends and buddies and so on. While I was at the Welland Minor Hockey House—it's over at the end of Fourth Street, behind the arena, right along the old canal bank. I had to reflect on the fact that—and, look, I don't know about where you are, sir, but hockey where I come from is an incredibly popular sport with kids, and with adults, too, with old-timers. But with the young kids it's an incredibly popular sport. You understand how increasingly families can't afford to equip their kids for hockey, because it's not inexpensive to outfit your kid with the skates and the various paddings and gear and so on to be able to play hockey safely. So let's not for a minute suggest that there isn't a relationship, that the welfare or the well-being of children isn't related to the ability of municipalities—places like Port Colborne, Welland, Thorold, Pelham, Wainfleet, St. Catharines and, heck, Niagara Falls too—to fund recreational programs, especially now that when you do have a two-parent

family, almost inevitably both parents are working. You found that out in the last election.

1900

Undoubtedly, almost everybody here other than Mr. Patten is going to be out knocking on doors. And he may be campaigning for a candidate of his choice up in his riding too.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Not Dalton.

Mr. Kormos: Mr. Hudak mentions—and I think you're right.

Mr. Hudak: I think so. There's a tension there. He's two seats away from the door.

Mr. Kormos: Of course—Mr. Patten is.

Maybe we're a day late and a dollar short, because the opposition is doing its best to open up a vacancy in the provincial cabinet. Mr. Patten maybe shouldn't have been in such a hurry to announce that he isn't running again, because we're doing our best to create a vacancy. Who knows? It could be the member for London—Fanshawe, Mr. Ramal.

Mr. Hudak: Yes, he's a good guy. It's him or Jeffrey. Linda Jeffrey has a good shot too.

Mr. Kormos: Mr. Hudak says Ms. Jeffrey.

Mr. Hudak: I would put her in, sure—a talented individual.

Mr. Kormos: Well, there you go.

There's no shortage of candidates, and we're doing our best. I tell you, folks, we're doing our best to create an opening in cabinet for you. A little bit of help wouldn't hurt. Come on, you've got nothing to lose and everything to win.

The time is so short. I want to talk about an issue that's very important to New Democrats, and that is, now that we're here talking about the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth—and New Democrats tell you we support the proposition—I have no doubt that our critic has indicated already that the bill should go to committee. Let's get that done and proceed promptly. But this government's failure, this government's refusal, this government's complete inability to understand how incredibly important it is to have the Ombudsman charged with oversight of family and children services is a disservice to every kid in this province. Haven't the events of the last week told us how critically effective the Ombudsman can be? Haven't the reports submitted already, in this instance by Mr. Marin, shown us how important it is for agencies like the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. or like the Family Responsibility Office—huh, Mr. Hudak?—or like the Municipal Property Assessment Corp.? How many more reports do we need to understand how important it is that government agencies or quasi-government agencies like those are the subject of oversight by the Ombudsman and his office?

Mr. Hudak: Criminal compensation.

Mr. Kormos: The Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Mr. Hudak recalls, as do I.

Why, for the life of me, does this government refuse to permit the Ombudsman to have the same oversight of family and children services after the tragedies that

we've witnessed and the inability of family and children services as a private agency to effectively be accountable? I, for one, believe—and I don't speak for my caucus—that the time has come for family and children services, as a corporation, as an entity, to end. It's unconscionable that in 2007 this Victorian sense of benevolence on the part of a private agency that is contracted by the government to address the welfare of kids—it's bizarre in this day and age that children's aid should be allowed to exist as a private corporation. I say it's time to abolish children's aid, to bring that work into the scope of an appropriate ministry so that there's accountability, so that the work is done by skilled public sector workers and so there is transparency, so that when there's a problem with family and children's services, you or you or any of us—Ms. Savoline—can stand up in his or her place and address the minister about a problem with family and children's services.

The minister now has to say, "Look, it's beyond my capacity. It's family and children's services. They have their own board, they've got their own legislation. I'm not responsible." And of course this government denies the Ombudsman the capacity to perform oversight of family and children's services. So on one hand, we have the creation of the office of the child advocate, which New Democrats say, yes, we support, especially as an officer of this assembly. But any enthusiasm about that is dampened by this government's absolute stubbornness and refusal to let children be protected by the office of the Ombudsman when it comes to kids in the custody of family and children's services. If you care about kids, you care about all of them. It means you care about the kids in the custody of FACS too. That means you can make sure they have access to an Ombudsman.

My time is up, I regret. Thank you kindly, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's always a pleasure to follow my never-short-of-loquacious colleague from Niagara Centre, who on this day, when the spirit of goodwill prevails in the Legislature, supports the bill that's before the Legislature. I know there are a few things he'd like to do differently, but let's focus on the bill; let's focus on the thing we're actually debating. That thing is that today the government is pleased to be moving forward on the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act that would, if passed, make the province's child and youth advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. So this legislation, if passed, will better protect the interests of children and youth by ensuring that no government, current or future—not our government, not any Parliament that should follow us—would be able to suppress the voice of the advocate. That advocate is going to speak for children and youth, the people who most times are unable to bring complaints forward on their own behalf.

We in this place all believe that one measure of the greatness of a society, one measure of how progressive a society is, isn't how it treats its wealthy or powerful or well-connected; it's how it treats its young and its old, its

sick and its vulnerable, but especially its youth. That's why all of us here—and I'm sure both opposition parties will stand up and speak for this—believe that our government has a responsibility to listen to everyone it serves, and that "everyone" includes children and youth.

The legislation, if passed, would ensure that children and youth would be heard not only by this government and this Parliament and these people who sit here, but by all of our colleagues who follow us in the next election and the ones following that.

Mr. Hudak: I always enjoy the comments of my colleague and neighbour, Mr. Kormos, the member for Niagara Centre. He makes some important and weighty remarks for us to consider as we debate Bill 165 this evening. I'll have a chance to speak in more detail shortly on behalf of the constituents of Erie—Lincoln.

Mr. Kormos raises a very interesting point, however, and I look forward to government members' response; that is, that this bill really fell short of giving the child advocate the authority that exists and has been wielded very effectively by the current Ombudsman. At the same time, this bill, if I understand Mr. Kormos's comments, restricts the Ombudsman—or does not permit the Ombudsman, is their way of putting it—to investigate children's aid societies. He certainly raised some issues recently, and very effectively, with respect to the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., now known as OLG. He raised some issues very effectively with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and with MPAC—effectively as well as dramatically—that compelled the government to make substantial changes in all of those circumstances.

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Imagine if the Ombudsman were able to take that investigative authority and that level of momentum into the children's aid societies that were recently exposed by the Auditor General to have some serious issues. The degree to which those issues are widespread or limited to a few bad apples is indeterminate at this time. I don't know if the government has adequately responded; to the Auditor General's report, I would say not. And no doubt Mr. Marin, the Ombudsman, would have a lot to say, if given the opportunity to investigate them from tip to toe, something that I do note the child advocate proposed in Bill 165 fails to do.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London—Fanshawe): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the chance to speak and comment on the speech of the member for Niagara Centre. It's very refreshing when you hear the member support a bill. Normally when we listen to him he's always opposing all the bills we propose. It seems like this time he believes strongly that we should support the bill and go forward to create an advocate group to support the youth and the people who have no support in our community.

So many kids suffer from mental illness and many different problems, kids and youth who have no family or anyone to support them. It's very important to create an advocacy group for those people to be protected. As you know, we hear a lot of stories, left and right, every day

across the province of Ontario about so many different kinds of abuse. If we create a task force, I think it will be very important to protect those vulnerable people among us.

The member for Niagara Centre was talking about why we have to create that and why it's not supposed to be linked to different agencies. It's very important to create an independent party that is outside the government and that doesn't belong to any party or government, to continue the job they start and to follow up in the future. It would be a non-partisan group. They would have one task, one direction: to look after the kids, to look after the youth, because that's very important.

We've talked many different times about the importance of our youth and our children. All of us believe that they are the future of Ontario. If we don't create some kind of mechanism, a task force to protect them, we cannot protect our future. That's why I'm standing up and supporting Bill 165.

It was refreshing to hear both members from Niagara region speak in support. Hopefully, when the vote comes, they'll vote and support the bill.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): I want to comment on the speech given to us by the member for Welland.

Mr. Hudak: Niagara Centre.

Mrs. Munro: Niagara Centre, sorry.

I think the important point we need to understand in his comments is the issue around the role of advocacy as opposed to having the opportunity to have investigative powers. I think all of us are very sensitive to the fact that over a number of years, there seems to be a gap, if you like, in the service, in the ability of someone to speak out on issues that are more than systemic, issues that are individual and require some kind of investigative support. So while the notion of advocacy is an extremely important one, and throughout this piece of legislation there's certainly reinforcement of the notion of giving voice to vulnerable youth, at the same time, there's a huge gap in terms of the ability to have investigative powers and a huge gap in terms of the ability to sort out some of the continual problems that seem to crop up between children, their families and the CAS around the province. I think this legislation has to be viewed from the perspective of its shortcomings as well as its strengths.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Niagara Centre, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Kormos: Let's be very, very clear. Section 13 of the bill, the functions and powers of the advocate:

"(a) provide advocacy to children and youth who are ... receiving ... services under the Child and Family Services Act;

"(b) provide advocacy to young persons who are being dealt with under the Ministry of Correctional Services Act ...

"(d) provide any other advocacy that is permitted under the regulations...."

There you are. The jurisdiction of the advocate is pretty narrow. One would like to see a children's advo-

cate that was adequately funded so it could be a broad-based advocate for children in every context: kids in schools, kids in communities, kids in health care. The government was very careful to restrict this advocate's power.

Imagine the workload that an advocate who had the capacity to advocate for children with respect to the issue of mental health services would have on their hands, and the great things they could do. But of course that's not what's being contemplated.

So while we support the proposition, be very careful about being too proud of what is but a modest achievement here. And the failure—this bill isn't the one that says the Ombudsman can't oversee family and children's services, but the bill points out the government's failure in that regard: the specific exclusion of the Ombudsman from any oversight of family and children's services, notwithstanding that the hardest-working child advocate in the world is going to continue to put kids at risk—kids who could get hurt badly, kids who are going to continue to die—because we don't have an office that can investigate systemic issues and failures within family and children's services. That's wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Hudak: Thank you. I'm just making sure we have the 20 minutes' time to address Bill 165. I hope I didn't pop up too soon. Okay, I'll proceed with some comments on Bill 165.

Of course, I enjoyed the comments of Mr. Kormos, my colleague and neighbour physically both here in the Legislature and in Niagara, who represents the Welland, Pelham, Thorold area and sits immediately, and suitably, to my left.

I want to start my comments on Bill 165, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act—I'll be more proper here: Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, standing in the name of the Honourable Ms. Chambers, Minister of Children and Youth Services—by commending our very hard-working and outstanding critic on children and youth services, Lisa MacLeod, the member for Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. MacLeod has been one outstanding addition to our Progressive Conservative caucus and here in the Ontario Legislative Assembly; somebody who has been a real firebrand, who has held the minister and the government to account on issues affecting Ottawa and eastern Ontario, and been a real champion for children and youth since winning her by-election not too long ago. Ms. MacLeod entered the Legislative Assembly—I'm trying to think what the exact date was.

Mrs. Munro: March.

Mr. Hudak: March 2006—and has been so effective that it's hard to actually remember who the previous member for Nepean—Carleton was.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo—Wellington): We traded up.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague Mr. Arnott from Wellington says we traded up. With all due respect to Mr. Baird, whom we miss dearly at the same time—

Mrs. Munro: You're sitting in his seat.

Mr. Hudak: I am sitting in Mr. Baird's seat here.

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Mr. Levac: Tell me how it feels.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague asks what it feels like to sit in Mr. Baird's seat. It has given me—I've been grandfathered in terms of heckling in the Legislature. As you may know, Mr. Tory wants to see a greater respect for decorum and the rules in the Ontario Legislature, and one of the benefits of Mr. Baird's seat is that I have an exemption to that, which allows me to heckle.

Mr. Levac: Because of the seat.

Mr. Hudak: Because of the seat, I've been grandfathered here in the Legislature to go beyond those rules.

Mr. Bradley, the Minister of Tourism and the member for St. Catharines, often has about 200 copies of an article about Mr. Tory wanting to see more decorum in the Legislature that he'll send to us across the floor if he feels that we've broken Mr. Tory's pledge—

Mrs. Munro: As a reminder.

Mr. Hudak: As a reminder, as my colleague from York North says. I always return them to Mr. Bradley, indicating that I have the John Baird exemption from sitting in this corner seat.

I want to get back to Ms. MacLeod, who has very ably replaced Mr. Baird as the provincial member for Nepean—Carleton—Mr. Baird, of course, the member for Ottawa West—Nepean federally, if I remember the federal riding boundaries correctly. Ms. MacLeod has been an outstanding addition to the team and a real champion for children and youth in the Legislature and for eastern Ontario. In fact, there are some issues I'll probably get to later in my remarks where she combines both. I remember her first question in the Ontario Legislature, where she was going like gangbusters from her seat just behind Mr. Arnott. I think it caught the government a little bit off guard that a new member would come in with such fire in the belly.

Mr. Kormos: She was full of vim and vinegar.

Mr. Hudak: Vim and vinegar, to say the least; two parts of each at least.

Ms. MacLeod had some very important insights into this legislation that I'll get to in a moment. I was just reading through her remarks upon second reading of the bill.

I think it's important at the beginning to indicate that it was actually a Progressive Conservative government, under then Premier Bill Davis, which in 1973 or thereabouts introduced Ontario's first child advocate as part of his government at the time. Interestingly, earlier on you'll recall that we were debating the Endangered Species Act, and Mr. Miller, our critic, the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, mentioned that it was actually the Davis government that had brought forward the first Endangered Species Act around the same time; I think it

was some time in the early 1970s. Of course, Bill Davis was elected as Premier in 1971.

So we have two pieces of legislation brought in by the Davis government that are now being impacted by new bills of the current government. Mr. Miller raised his concerns. I think we're very supportive of the principle, obviously, of protecting endangered species in the province of Ontario. Mr. Miller had some very important suggestions on how to improve that bill to ensure that it is successful. Similarly, Ms. MacLeod, as our critic, has brought forward a number of important suggestions with respect to the child advocate that I know my colleagues will be sharing their views upon as well.

So it was in 1973, if I recall, and now, 30-plus years later, we see legislation to redefine the role of the child advocate, to take the role outside of the ministry of the day, which is currently the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and give it more independence as what's defined as an officer of the Legislature, just like the Auditor General, who I mentioned earlier on, is an officer of the Legislature and similarly the Ombudsman. I guess the Information and Privacy Commissioner would be an officer of the Legislature and the Integrity Commissioner would also be considered as such—very prominent individuals who play very important roles in how this place conducts itself. Typically, as well, those individuals are picked by all-party consent. There's usually a committee of party representatives from each of our official parties in the Legislature to find individuals for those jobs, because they play an important role and you put a lot of trust in those individuals, given their status.

This legislation, if I recall, suggests a five-year term, renewable for an additional five-year term, which means, when you're considering at least five years and potentially 10, that that first choice for child advocate, if this bill does pass, will be a crucial decision for the Ontario Legislature, through its representatives, to make.

The point I want to make, though, in a more specific sense, is that I'm not quite clear what direction the McGuinty government plans to go with the child advocate. If the intent of the government, through Minister Chambers, is to create a powerful new individual, an officer of the Legislature the likes of the Ombudsman or the Auditor General, then you'd think like powers would be afforded to that individual—investigative powers, for example. Or, if you're just creating an advocate, then just go ahead and say so, rather than trying to dress up a child advocate in the clothes of an Ombudsman or an Auditor General.

Let me go back a little bit and talk about some of the history before this bill came to the Legislature. I think you'll remember that in the previous Progressive Conservative government, there was a point of debate about the independence of the child advocate under the community and social services ministry, I believe it was at the time. The Ontario Liberal Party was then in opposition, and Mr. McGuinty, then Leader of the Opposition, had said that he would create an independent office for the child advocate that would report to the Legislature, as

opposed to the government or through the ministry of the day, then community and social services, now children and youth services. It was one of the very many campaign promises made by the Dalton McGuinty party in opposition in the run-up to the 2003 election. I think we've tabulated—was it 240 campaign promises? Something like that. This was one of them. There seemed to be some expectation from people interested in this field that that would be forthwith upon assuming government.

You will recall, however, that despite that campaign promise in the fall 2003, once Dalton McGuinty had become Premier of the province of Ontario, instead of bringing forward a bill like Bill 165, the government decided to commission consultants from outside of government—mind you, there's a bit of irony in this—not only not proceeding in the time frame expected by stakeholders for keeping the child advocate promise but simultaneously breaking another promise not to use outside consultants unless absolutely necessary. I don't think there was a case made that Whitehead Research Consultants Ltd. of London, Ontario, were the only individuals or group that could do this type of research and make recommendations to the province of Ontario. Nonetheless, in delaying one promise, Dalton McGuinty was breaking another by hiring these consultants, who began the work in April 2004.

In the fall of 2003, the consultants were hired. They began their review in April 2004. In August 2004, the final report of the consultants was tabled with the Minister of Children and Youth Services, who was Dr. Bountrogianni at the time, from Hamilton Mountain, if I remember the riding correctly. We are already—as my colleague for Nepean—Carleton, Ms. MacLeod, points out—almost a year behind schedule of what a reasonable expectation would have been for this bill to be before the Legislative Assembly.

Then in March 2005—so again, this was tabled in August 2004. I know August is often a slower-moving month. It's a time when people in Ontario, whether they're in politics or the civil service etc. take some time to be with family, or take time away from work at the very least, so it's understandable that the minister wouldn't necessarily act on that final report in August 2004. But, sadly, it took until March 2005 before any announcement was made about what to do with that final report.

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Effectively, the consultants were hired outside of government, so at additional expense to government. They did their work. They tabled their report in August 2004, but it wasn't until March 2005—I've been doing some quick math in my head—some seven months later, before there was really the first word from the minister, at the time Dr. Bountrogianni, on how she planned to proceed on the final report of the consultants. I would probably suggest, if I recall correctly—I know my colleague Ms. MacLeod would know far more than I would—that there was some outcry, some protest, at least some upset, by those engaged in this process earlier on, or those who were strong advocates for legislation to proceed, that we

were now in March 2005 and still nothing had been put before the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario.

In March 2005, the then minister, Minister Bountrogianni, announced that legislation to establish Ontario's new office of the child and youth advocate was imminent. The word was "imminent," meaning probably "in the very near future," "immediately," "soon," "promptly."

Mr. Arnott: Next week.

Mr. Hudak: Next week would be reasonable, my colleague from Wellington says. We are in March. The House was in session, I believe, in March 2005—not August—when Minister Bountrogianni announced the legislation was imminent. A news release issued on March 8, 2005, stated—I'm quoting from the press release of the time. Is that the ides of March, by the way?

Mrs. Munro: The 13th.

Mr. Hudak: I just thought there'd be another irony.

March 8, 2005: "The McGuinty government will introduce legislation this spring that, if passed, would better protect the interests of vulnerable children and youth by establishing an independent child advocate in Ontario, Children and Youth Services Minister Marie Bountrogianni announced today."

My colleague Mr. Arnott from Wellington would guess that would be in about a week, probably sometime in mid-March, maybe around the ides of March. But, you know, not to hold the assembly in too much suspense, the entire month of March passed, April passed, followed—in all likelihood, if I recall, after April—by May, June and then, as these things can be predictable, the spring sitting of the Ontario Legislative Assembly passes by and no bill enters the assembly to create the office of the child advocate as promised by Dalton McGuinty, signalling yet another one of his promises relegated to the dustbin of history. So no bill came in the spring.

I know that advocates and colleagues here in the assembly were extremely concerned that despite the fact of an imminent piece of legislation, nothing had arrived at the table and been distributed to members of the assembly: more outcry. A new minister was in position, and she came under significant pressure to move on the legislation. Finally, on November 30, 2006, some 20 months after legislation was "imminent," Bill 165 was introduced to the assembly by the new minister, Minister Chambers. So not exactly keeping promises with great alacrity, and I think there is some debate whether this actually fits with what was promised back in 2003, so many years ago now.

When the bill was brought forward, as I mentioned, the appointed advocate would be an officer of the assembly; will hold office for a term of five years and may be reappointed for a further term of five years. Interestingly, the individual "shall work exclusively as an advocate and shall not hold any other office under the crown or engage in any other employment." Fair enough. But the point I was going to make is that it's strictly an advocacy role. Let me read you some of the functions of the advocate:

"(a) provide advocacy to children and youth who are seeking or receiving approved services under the Child and Family Services Act;

"(b) provide advocacy to young persons who are being dealt with under the Ministry of Correctional Services Act;

"(c) promote the rights under part V of the Child and Family Services Act of children in care and the rights under part V of the Ministry of Correctional Services Act of young persons in custody; and

"(d) provide any other advocacy that is permitted under the regulations or any other act," meaning if cabinet decided to increase the advocate's responsibilities, they could do so via regulation. Mr. Kormos had talked about that a little bit in terms of section 13 of Bill 165, functions and powers.

I do note, however, that this legislation does not go as far as one would have expected from looking at the acts that create the other officers of the assembly. I noted the Ombudsman and the Auditor General, to name but two. So if you're going to go down the path of creating an officer of the assembly, you wonder why you don't go whole hog and give the animal all the teeth that he or she would require. In many senses, the teeth have been replaced with gums. The teeth are missing and therefore gums are there, I guess, as opposed to being replaced.

In his remarks, Mr. Kormos had mentioned earlier, imagine if the Ombudsman had had the authority to investigate some of the abuses that were sadly brought to light by the Auditor General with respect to children's aid societies across the province of Ontario. It certainly was very upsetting to learn. In my office, I would say we have a very strong working relationship with family and children's services in Niagara. We appreciate their work in assisting children in need, in very vulnerable situations. Obviously, it's extremely difficult work to do.

But when you hear about some of these other cases, about the SUVs, the expensive vehicles, the expense accounts, money that should be going to children in need and families in vulnerable situations, it's certainly extremely upsetting. If the Ombudsman had the opportunity to investigate that, I think he'd turn it upside down in a matter of 40 days.

We're seeing that happening now with the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp., which may cause a minister to step down. We saw, similarly, an entire change in the government's position on the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. We all remember that Dalton McGuinty, when asked to address the issue of skyrocketing property assessments, initially said, "We didn't run on that," and had no plan to address the issue whatsoever. Ironically, I don't think he ran on banning pit bulls either, or banning sushi or going after farmers' markets in the province of Ontario with all kinds of new inspectors. Nonetheless, initially Dalton McGuinty turned a blind eye.

I'm happy that some of my colleagues here in the assembly voted for my private member's bill, the Homestead Act, to cap the assessment increase at 5% a year. It's now part of official PC policy to be imple-

mented by a future John Tory government. I think that helped to stir things up a bit with Mr. McGuinty, but ultimately the momentum caused by the Ombudsman's report caused the government to react, finally. They suspended assessments for a couple of years. They've asked for some reforms at MPAC that don't go far enough, in my view, and their solution in the recent budget certainly was no solution whatsoever—more smoke and mirrors. Nonetheless, the point I'm trying to make is the Ombudsman has been extremely effective. As a matter of fact, the Ombudsman has probably been the most significant cabinet minister in the Dalton McGuinty government in terms of actually effecting real change.

Mr. Kormos: Protecting public interest.

Mr. Hudak: Protecting public interest, as cabinet ministers should be doing, but haven't been wont to do in some of the examples that I mentioned earlier on. It's hard to think of many real structural changes that Dalton McGuinty has actually made. You could say that the Ombudsman, in fact, has been more effective in bringing about change than the Premier himself.

I can't remember the exact remarks, but I was disappointed to see some Liberal insiders insulting the Ombudsman today in a National Post article. I don't have it front of me; maybe I'll get to that later on. It was disappointing.

I know my time is running short, and I didn't get as far into the bill as I had hoped in my 20 minutes. I will conclude by saying, again, I enjoyed the comments of our critic, Ms. MacLeod, the member for Nepean—Carleton. I appreciate the points she's brought forward on this. I do hope that we'll understand better if the government is truly creating an officer of the assembly who is independent and has authority to investigate and to make change or if it's just a dress-up advocate who ultimately won't advance the cause of vulnerable children.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh): I'm pleased this evening to have a few minutes to speak and to comment on this bill. I certainly know that with my mother watching this debate this evening, which I know she is—

Mr. Hudak: Really? What's her name?

Mr. Brownell: Catherine. I know that having grown up in a family of 12 kids and having been a teacher for 32½ years, it is of utmost importance that I say a few words. I know Minister Chambers has been a strong advocate here in the Legislature for children and outside this Legislature. It was just last week that the minister understood that I came from this big family. I remember meeting her afterwards and she said, "It almost makes me tired to think about it."

The thing is, when I was growing up, I had a loving, caring family who were interested in myself and my six brothers and five sisters. My father passing away 35 years ago left my mum with eight kids at home. She was always that voice, and still is that voice. She's watching, and she still will comment about my performance here in

the Legislature and the performance of many other people in this Legislature. But I always had an advocate.

There are children in this province who need an advocate. Last night at the Big Brothers Big Sisters reception we heard of a young girl who had an advocate, who had a mentor. There are a lot of children in this province, many of whom do not have those mentors, do not have advocates, and whose voices are being lost. This advocate will be that voice—an independent officer, certainly as independent as the Auditor General and the Ombudsman. The appointment of this advocate is going to be by an all-party legislative committee. That means that all parties will be part of the appointment and there will be a strong voice for the children of this province in the future, and I'm very pleased about that.

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Mr. Arnott: I'm very pleased to respond for a moment to the member for Erie—Lincoln, who gave a very interesting speech this evening about Bill 165. As members know, this member is our party's finance critic, and he does a superb job in that capacity. Tonight, he demonstrated a breadth of knowledge about social issues that I think the House would want to commend as well.

I'm looking forward to speaking to this bill when I get the chance tonight, but it appears that the government side is standing down their comments tonight and reserving judgment on this bill. It's interesting when the government side isn't prepared to put up speakers to stand up in this House to explain their legislation, to justify their legislation and to explain away some of the broken promises and delays that are inherent in this bill. I would hope that we can challenge the government members, some of whom are here, to put up an argument in defence of their bill tonight. I would hope that that would be forthcoming.

Obviously, if the Legislature is in session—the government moved a motion to have us sit tonight till 9:30. Occasionally when the New Democrats have voted against that procedural motion, they were taunted in the House and it was suggested that we don't want to work. Well, we're here to work. We're happy to be here and happy to debate the government's initiatives, and bring forward our concerns and ideas with respect to government legislation, but if the government won't put up any speakers, it's very difficult for us—

Interjection.

Mr. Arnott: Well, we look forward to hearing at least one speech, apparently, from the government side tonight. That will give us an opportunity again to hear the current view of the government on this issue. I would hope there will be other speeches as well, so that we can have a chance to debate these issues. This is an important bill that has apparently been a long time coming, based on the information I have before me and that I hope to expand upon in a few minutes. Obviously we would want to debate the issues that are inherent in the bill, and I look forward to hearing more speeches from the government side tonight on this important issue.

Once again, I want to compliment and thank the member for Erie–Lincoln for his thoughtful presentation.

Mr. Kormos: I was pleased to be able to sit here and hear the member for Erie–Lincoln explain in a most eloquent way his position and the position of his caucus with respect to this legislation. He's a hard-working MPP who doesn't sit here like—we've used this phrase so many times in the last couple of days—a bump on a log, nodding his head, eyelids drooping. You heard Tim Hudak stand up and use the modest 20 minutes—all we have is 20 minutes; that's all that's allotted to any one of us. Tim Hudak makes sure he uses his 20 minutes. He knows his constituents deserve to hear where he stands on these issues. New Democrats stand up and make it clear where they stand on these issues and use all of the modest time available to them.

It's shocking to see well-paid Liberal MPPs not participating in this debate. To hear well-paid Liberal MPPs talk about the two-minute question and comment that takes place between speeches as participation in the debate is beyond silly. It's less than accurate. You guys call two minutes a speech—120 seconds representing your constituents here on the floor of this chamber? I call it cheating them out of effective representation, and I suggest that you return some of that pay for not having earned it.

Mr. Levac: I just want to put out that the last two minutes that was used didn't say anything about the bill, so I'll say it. There's a very old expression that works very well: Make your point and say no more. It's a great bill for kids. I look forward to passing it.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Erie–Lincoln, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. O'Toole: The Liberals think it's perfect.

Mr. Hudak: My colleague from Durham says the Liberals think it's perfect. I think it's far from perfect. There are a lot of improvements that could be made to the government's approach to children's services in a general sense, as brought forward by my colleague the critic from Nepean–Carleton.

There has been a rumour that one of the government members will speak tonight on this piece of legislation.

Mr. Kormos: For how long?

Mr. Hudak: I don't know how long. I don't want to put any particular pressure on.

I want to say hi to Catherine Brownell, by the way. Her son is working very hard this evening on night duty. Where were you in the family structure, of the 12, by the way?

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Number two. Boy, a lot of pressure being at the top of that ladder.

In my remaining time—I'll have a chance to speak a bit more, hopefully, this evening. But I do want to raise—I know the minister is here; it's always good when the minister is here for her legislation.

Mr. Kormos: I want to hear from Berardinetti.

Mr. Hudak: Mr. Berardinetti may be the rumoured individual who is going to be speaking this evening. It's quite possible.

Mr. Kormos: Don't his constituents deserve to know where he stands on this bill?

Mr. Hudak: There's no doubt, I say to my colleague. There's no doubt.

But I do want to say—the minister is here—that the Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre has been doing an outstanding job for many years. The minister is nodding, I'm pleased to see. I know she is familiar with their work. They have a request in to the province for some additional funding, as do children's treatment centres across the province. There was some additional funding in the budget. Their hope is that more will flow to start fighting the waiting list. Of course, autism remains a very important issue in my communities, whether it's Beamsville, Fort Erie or Dunnville—communities I'm proud to represent. I meet with many constituents who want to see greater funding for therapy for children and the families of autistic children, and I do hope we will see that forthcoming, because I think the response to date has been inadequate. That inadequacy has to move to adequacy.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Arnott: I'm glad the member for Erie–Lincoln mentioned the issue of children's treatment centres, because it was a shortcoming of the budget that was announced last week, as far as I'm concerned.

In our riding of Waterloo–Wellington, we are served by KidsAbility, which is an outstanding children's treatment centre. Before the House resumed sitting this spring, we had an opportunity to hear from many of the parents and families who look to KidsAbility to provide their children with the best possible start in life. I was privileged to attend that meeting, along with the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, the member for Kitchener Centre and the member for Cambridge, who was there as well. We heard from a great many families who are concerned about the delays in terms of the initiation of services for their special-needs children. At the end of the meeting, we all expressed our support for doing something when the House came back, and certainly I brought forward letters to the minister and continued to advocate on this issue, as I have in the past. I know the member for Cambridge and the member for Kitchener–Waterloo have done the same thing.

When we had the chance at the standing committee on finance and economic affairs to write a pre-budget report after we had finished the public hearings that lead up to that concluding process, our party brought forward a motion calling upon the government members to support a motion that would have encouraged the Minister of Finance to provide adequate funding to eliminate the waiting lists at children's treatment centres.

I could not believe it, but the government members who were present at the committee that day voted the motion down. They did not support a recommendation asking the Minister of Finance in his budget to eliminate the waiting lists at children's treatment centres. A num-

ber of the motions our party brought forward were supported in the course of that day and were reflected in the final report of the standing committee on finance. In fact, I brought forward one asking that that particular committee have public hearings on the loss of manufacturing jobs, and that was supported by a majority of the members who were there that day. So it wasn't like they were just voting down all the opposition motions; they were picking and choosing. In some cases, motions from our side passed. This particular motion did not pass, and I was extremely disappointed and surprised.

But then, of course, the explanation was forthcoming in the budget. Because while the minister stood in his place and mentioned children's treatment centres and the fact that he had increased the funding for children's treatment centres, when you looked into the budget papers, into the fine print, you found that they only increased the funding for children's treatment centres by \$4 million, which wasn't nearly enough. They bragged about \$10 million last year as having been something great that they had done in the previous year's budget, but clearly that is not sufficient funding to eliminate the waiting lists, and I was very disappointed; in fact, I highlighted that in response to the budget.

So even though that issue doesn't directly relate to Bill 165—and I'm going to get to that—I'm glad that the member for Erie—Lincoln mentioned it. I would implore the Minister of Children and Youth Services to do what she can. I know that there's going to be a lot of money spent in the next few months leading up to the election—a lot of money announced. Surely we can make this a priority so as to ensure that the waiting lists for children at children's treatment centres can be eliminated. When you think of the fact that \$22 billion more is being spent this year by this government than when they first took office, you would think they would be able to find a few million dollars. I think the children's treatment centre organizations were asking for \$20 million. You would think they could find that amount of money for the children who are in need of these services obviously and who otherwise won't get the best possible start in life.

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This bill, Bill 165, An Act to establish and provide for the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, has now been debated for a few days in this House; it was introduced on November 30, 2006. I think that when we look at this issue, we as MPPs should conclude that we should all want to be child advocates, all of us who are members of this House and privileged to serve in the Ontario Legislature, and be responsible for a very important social subject area. Certainly the well-being of all of Ontario's children should be among our highest priorities. That's why this legislation is very important. We also know that vulnerable children need special consideration and protection.

Our party has long understood the need to embrace these principles. I know that our party's critic for this ministry, the member for Nepean—Carleton, talked at some length in her second reading speech about the fact

that it was our party, when in government in the 1970s and 80s, that blazed the trail on this issue. It was Premier Davis who appointed the first child advocate in 1984. The man's name is Mr. Les Thorne. I know that he's been in the Legislature to observe the debates on this issue, and I'm pleased that he has been. She even went back further than that to 1977, some 30 years ago, when the interministerial provincial advisory committee, or IMPAC, was established to ensure that barriers would be broken down, silos would be broken down to ensure that children were receiving the services they would need.

She also pointed to the establishment, in 1978, of the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy. These two organizations, taken together, were intended to bring together the government's responsibilities in child welfare, children's mental health, development disabilities, youth justice, education, health, family treatment and children's rights—all of these things coming together in terms of the government's responsibilities, so that the silos would be broken down. We as a party obviously embrace these principles and want to be supportive of continued efforts to ensure that children are protected.

Going back to 1985, we know that since that time the Child and Family Services Act has required that children in care must be made aware of the fact that the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy exists and that those children must be informed of their rights under this act. That's a requirement of legislation that's been on the books for a long time now. Children in care must also be made aware of how complaints about unacceptable treatment should be made. If you can imagine trying to educate and inform a young child of this—I'm sure it's a very challenging thing and has to be done in a compassionate, sensitive and appropriate way, but it must be done. This information must be delivered in a language that the child or youth understands, and the information obviously needs to be explained to them in a way that they understand. Children and youth are entitled to privacy to communicate with their family, a lawyer or an advocate from the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy. These are amongst the rights that these children have and must continue to have.

On average, the advocate's office receives more than 3,000 calls a year, which I'm sure is a huge caseload and volume for one person with a small staff. The majority of these calls are about standards of practice for children in residential care, peer-on-peer violence situations, children living at home with special needs and aboriginal child welfare. Again, obviously the child advocate's office is very busy with the responsibilities that fall under their jurisdiction at the present time.

The child advocate currently reports to the Minister of Children and Youth Services under existing legislation. Bill 165 would make the advocate an independent officer who reports directly to the Legislature. This is yet another officer of the Legislature; we have a number of them now already. I think the step of ensuring that the child advocate is an officer of the Legislature is an improvement, because it ensures that the government of

the day can't be in a position of unduly influencing that person. I think that's a positive reform.

When you think of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Auditor General, the privacy commissioner and others, all of these offices are officers of the Legislature, which should to a large degree depoliticize their responsibilities and ensure that the public interest is upheld, not necessarily the government of the day's interest.

The NDP, I know, has raised concern about the provincial advocate, that the provincial advocate would not have formal investigative powers and would not be able to summon and force the attendance of witnesses, compel testimony under oath or compel the production of documents or evidence. These powers have been granted to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate in British Columbia. In listening to the New Democrats in this House on this debate, they have been very consistent in their views in this respect. I think that is a very important perspective that they're bringing forward that needs to be given serious consideration by the government to ensure that the child advocate has the power to do his or her job in the way that is appropriate and protects children.

If we look at the chronology on this issue since the Liberals took office in the fall of 2003 and even before that, we know that in the summer of 2003, in the lead-up to what became the provincial election, it's my understanding that the Liberal Party issued a news release in July 2003 promising and committing a future Liberal government, if elected, to pass legislation creating an independent office for the child advocate that would report to the Legislature rather than the government. As we know, the Liberals made a lot of promises leading up to the election—more than 240, I believe—and we also know that something like 50 of those promises have been broken. The government will have a lot of explaining to do when the government members go to the door in the next few months. In many cases, the Liberal members are running for re-election, and I know they're going to be—if they haven't already—hearing loud and clear from their constituents. They're going to be called to account, not so much by the Conservatives and the New Democrats in the Legislature but by their constituents when they're asked why they did not keep many of those key promises they had made in the last election. They know as well as I do, especially the experienced ones who've gone through a couple of elections—and when I look around the House, there are a lot of them here—that they're going to find when they make commitments going into the next election that a lot of people are going to question their sincerity because of their performance in the last provincial election.

So that promise was made in July 2003. In the fall of 2003, after the election, after the Liberals were elected to form a majority government in this place, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services commissioned researchers to study the Child and Family Services Act, developing recommendations regarding the establishment of a new office of the child and youth advocate. The contract for

this review was granted to a consortium of four researchers organized by Whitehead Research Consultants Ltd., a London, Ontario-based consulting firm. I'm not familiar with this firm, so I'm not going to criticize their professionalism or their capability, but I do recall a promise made by Dalton McGuinty in the election campaign that he was not going to hire outside consultants if the expertise existed within the provincial government, within the ministries, within the tens of thousands of employees of the Ontario public service that the Liberals purport to respect so highly. Obviously, the government felt that either the expertise didn't exist within the ministry—which I highly doubt—or they wanted to give a contract to this consultancy firm, breaking one of their key election promises. And this was within weeks, I would guess, of their election, because of course they were elected in October 2003 and it was in the fall that they engaged this consulting firm to do this work.

I'm told that in April 2004 the third party review began, so there was quite a period of time from the time the consultant was hired to when the review actually began in April 2004. In August of that same year, 2004, a few months later, the final report of the third party review was submitted to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. That was almost a year after the Liberals had formed the government. But it wasn't until March 2005, many months later, that the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the former minister, the member for Hamilton Mountain, announced that legislation to establish Ontario's new office of the child and youth advocate was imminent. Again, as the member for Erie-Lincoln pointed out—I don't have my dictionary handy, but when you think of the definition of the word "imminent," you would probably conclude that maybe it would be in the next week, maybe in the next two weeks. To me, that's what "imminent" means, even around here, where of course definitions sometimes have different meanings perhaps than in the world on the street. "Imminent," to me, means in the next week or two. Clearly—

Mr. O'Toole: How about the OLG investigation?

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Mr. Arnott: Well, we'll get to that later, but the fact is that "imminent" means in the next few days or the next week. Clearly, there was an expectation created in March 2005 that the legislation would be introduced at least in that spring sitting of the Ontario Legislature.

In fact, I understand that a news release was issued on March 8, 2005, stating, "The McGuinty government will introduce legislation this spring that, if passed, would better protect the interests of vulnerable children and youth by establishing an independent child advocate in Ontario." This is what the minister said that day. And again, that was two years ago—two years ago. Clearly, the definition of "imminent" means something different to this government than what it means in Waterloo-Wellington.

Between March and June 2005, the spring sitting came and went and the government did not introduce the bill that spring. It was on November 30, 2006, when a new

minister of Children and Youth Services introduced Bill 165, and this is the legislation we have before us today, "imminent" meaning to them 21 months. I think we can see that a number of promises were broken during the course of the development of this legislation.

I want to make reference to some of the key points our caucus is concerned about with respect to this bill. First of all, as I said earlier, we are very proud of the tradition and the history of our party with respect to this kind of issue. It was the PC government under the direction and leadership of the Honourable Bill Davis that was the first to introduce a child advocate in Ontario.

But I have to say, in criticism of this government and this particular bill, that it was the McGuinty government's dithering and delays on the children and youth file that led us to such a long wait before this bill was introduced, and that in itself is unacceptable to the opposition. The Liberals made a promise in 2003 and then stalled by commissioning these private consultants that they promised they would not hire to undertake a review that took months and months. Almost two years after that initial promise, the Liberals stated the legislation would be introduced imminently, and then it took almost two years after that before the bill was actually introduced. Now we are here two years later and we're still debating it at second reading.

Another important point I want to make on behalf of our caucus is that children in Ontario have suffered under the Liberal's ineffective and unfocused government, as revealed last December by the Auditor General's review of children's aid societies in Ontario. As we heard at that time, and we were quite distressed—there was a great deal of press coverage—there were a lot of people very concerned about the fact that in some cases, in some children's agencies, money was being spent in a way that quite frankly did not pass the smell test; it did not pass muster. I think anybody reading about the fact that some of the money that was allocated to children's aid societies to be spent on the protection of children was being spent on very expensive luxury sport utility vehicles for the agencies, and in some cases paying for extravagant, expensive trips abroad for conferences, obviously—and I know when it was raised in the Legislature, I think the Premier was as concerned as the rest of us and had to express regret that this was happening.

But it brought to light and gave us an opportunity again to express concern about the fact that the Ombudsman does not have the opportunity to oversee or to receive complaints and act upon complaints about children's aid societies. This is an issue that has been discussed at length in the Legislature too. My own view is that the role of the Ombudsman has become considerably enhanced in recent years, and if that's going to continue to be a trend, then I think it's reasonable to look at children's aid societies as perhaps something that should be on the list of responsibilities for the Ombudsman, to ensure that those kinds of things don't happen again in the future.

Our party's critic, the member for Nepean–Carleton, when she had the chance to speak about this bill, expressed four principle concerns that I want to reiterate in this House at this time. She expressed her concern about the lack of consultation leading up to this bill. There are a number of groups that feel they were not given adequate consultation, even though this bill has taken almost three and a half years, which makes it very hard to explain why the various interest groups that would want to bring something to the table in terms of the development of legislation would not be given that opportunity to do so. Why we would hear complaints about groups that have something to say about this issue that can't get in to see the minister, that are told they can't have a meeting with the minister to discuss these kinds of issues, is beyond me, especially when it takes three and a half years to get a bill to this point. If there was an emergency of some sort and the bill had to be brought in overnight, you'd understand why in some cases not everybody who had an interest in the bill was consulted, but when it takes three and a half years and you're still hearing complaints about groups that can't get in to see the minister, obviously there's a problem.

Our caucus critic, the member for Nepean–Carleton, expressed her objection, that this bill lacks teeth in many respects. She also expressed concern that access to the advocate isn't guaranteed and that the bill leaves out certain groups that are presently protected by the child advocate. So those are obviously issues that need to be discussed in the course of this debate tonight.

As I said earlier, I'm concerned and disappointed that the government side apparently is not putting up speakers. We are here to do government business because the government has introduced legislation, and I'm certainly happy to be here. I'm quite prepared to be here till 9:30 tonight to listen to the debate, and I'm glad to have this chance to participate in it briefly.

I don't understand why the government would be unwilling and unprepared to allow some of their members to speak to the legislation, many of whom would probably want to have the opportunity, would probably want to be in the position where they can be seen to be doing something about an issue that I'm sure many of them care about, so that when they go to the people in the month of September, they can talk about the important work they've done, the speeches they've given in the Legislature, the speeches they've given in caucus—and the government whip knows about those—so as to demonstrate to their constituents that they've done something while they've been here in Parliament between 2003 and 2007, to demonstrate why they were here and what they've done to earn the support of their constituents while they're seeking re-election. Unfortunately, they're not being given the opportunity to do that this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: Of course, these are the two-minute slots that follow a speech, that follow an address to the chamber, in which one can comment on that address or

pose questions about it. I don't pretend for this to be my contribution to the debate; I made that earlier this evening when I used the modest 20 minutes that's available to each and every member of this chamber—to you and you and you and you. Yes, you with your head in your hands, and you. It's the modest period of time afforded each and every member of this chamber to stand up, speak out, speak up, on behalf of your constituents and, in the context of this legislation, on behalf of those kids in your ridings. I listened carefully to the comments by the member for Waterloo–Wellington, Ted Arnott, who always delivers a thoughtful and careful analysis when he addresses legislation here in this chamber.

New Democrats are going to make sure this bill goes to committee. We will do that at the time when the bill goes to second reading vote, and I have every reason to believe that it will pass. We'll do that by using the procedural "No" when the Speaker asks, "Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?" That way, opposition members force this bill to committee.

Perhaps government members will be a little more forthcoming. Has the cat got your tongue, or tongues, or is it that you just have nothing to say?

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Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): We have lots to say here on the government side. We could perhaps do it for hours, but you know what? The place to do it is at committee. We are now on second reading of this bill and the procedure—everyone wants to talk about procedure—is that you finish second reading or the second day of second reading. We finish the second reading debate—

Mr. Kormos: Third day of second reading.

Mr. Berardinetti: Third day. Thank you. The member from Niagara has corrected me.

So three days. For some reason, the Tories don't want this to go through. But we send it to committee and we debate it at committee. We bring forward amendments at committee. The minister, on a previous occasion, made a commitment that she will look at the input that has been put forward by the opposition and perhaps consider making some changes to the bill. But why sit here and take shots at each other when we could be more constructive at committee? The minister is present in the room today.

The member from Waterloo–Wellington spoke very eloquently. He brought up a number of key points. I think that at committee perhaps some of those ideas could be implemented; some of those ideas could be brought in. But that's where it should go. After that, it comes back here.

I'm new here, three years or whatever. My understanding was—and maybe the member from Niagara can correct me—did the Tories do third reading on debate? Did they do a third reading? We're going to debate this for third reading and, at that time, there could be changes made. But let's debate it at committee and then bring it here.

Mr. O'Toole: I always listen with reflection to the member from Waterloo–Wellington. I could repeat much of what he said with respect to the disappointment primarily in the promise and the timeline. Here we are, in the later hours of the debate, bringing in a bill that was part of their fundamental platform.

I think it is respectful to say that the minister is present. In her remarks—I'm reading from Hansard—she says, "The child advocate represents children and youth who are seeking or receiving services under the Child and Family Services Act. Those services could be in the youth justice system, in the children's mental health or complex special-needs systems, in the child protection and well-being system, or in provincial and demonstration schools for the deaf and blind. The advocate's office also reviews cases that involve complaints about the treatment or care of a child or youth in a program funded by the Ontario government."

Last night, I attended an outrageous meeting in the riding of Durham. It was about the cuts made to Lake-ridge Health. Over \$3 million dollars was cut from program spending to the Pinewood treatment centre dealing with children's mental health issues. The advocacy there last night from the CAW and from the Ontario Health Coalition and others—we were there to listen, but I was moved. I also listened quite clearly to the comments with respect to the children's treatment centres and the inadequacy of the funding that's being provided. In any form of advocacy, it's concerning.

With all respect to the minister, I have the greatest respect for her intentions, but the delays have been brought about her ministry by Premier McGuinty and Greg Sorbara. I would say that she's been hoodwinked in the cabinet meetings to bring any concern—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Delaney: It's a real pleasure to stand tonight to talk about some of the people who really make western Mississauga go. I'm standing here to represent the people from central Erin Mills, from Churchill Meadows, from Meadowvale, from Lisgar—the home of our new GO train station—and from Streetsville. Of course, sitting beside me is my colleague from Brampton, a very hard-working, effective member. I'm proud to call her my colleague.

Some of our colleagues from across the floor have been challenging us to see whether or not we can engage in a marathon on a bill that is really a very simple one. It's about a Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. One of the things that I learned when I was doing marketing and advertising—and it's something that certainly comes through when you're doing a debate in this Legislature—is a slogan that goes a bit like this: "The job is not done when there's nothing left to put in; the job is done when there's nothing left to throw out."

Brevity is an art. I think in a debate like this, over a bill that's pretty straightforward, let's be brief on it. This is about a Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, an advocate who speaks for children and youth who are unable to speak for themselves. Ontario's children deserve

this. We said four years ago that this appointment would take place through an all-party legislative committee, and we said that we would make the advocate as independent as the Auditor General and the Ombudsman. This is what Ontario's children deserve, this is what all three parties want to have here, and Ontarians deserve nothing less.

In conclusion, I will agree with all of my colleagues on both sides: Let's pass the bill; let's get on with it.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Waterloo-Wellington, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Arnott: I want to express my appreciation to the member for Niagara Centre, the member for Scarborough Southwest, my colleague the member for Durham and the member for Mississauga West for responding to my speech this evening.

I want to pick up on a point that was made by the member for Mississauga West. He said that brevity is an art, and I would agree with him on that. I think of probably the most important and famous political speech that has ever been made in the last 200 years, the Gettysburg address by Abraham Lincoln, and it was about two minutes long. School kids learn it by heart in the United States, and in many, many cases—

Mr. Kormos: Because they didn't have television then.

Mr. Arnott: Well, I think brevity is an art, but let's hear from all the members who are here. Even if they only speak for two minutes, let's see them stand up and debate the issues. They don't have to take their whole 20 minutes if they don't want to. If they express support for this bill or they have concerns about this bill, they can speak for even two minutes. It would be better than no speeches at all. That would be my point in response to the member for Mississauga West.

I was very interested to hear the member for Durham talk about his local hospital issue. Clearly, that's an important issue for the children in his riding—for all of his constituents, but particularly, in many cases, I'm sure, the children. I was glad to hear of his support for the issue of the children's treatment centres and the appropriate funding.

I would never for a minute question the sincerity of the Minister of Children and Youth Services in terms of her desire to clear up those waiting lists; I'm sure that she would want to. What I would question is why the Minister of Finance did not find more than \$4 million in his budget to deal with that particular issue, and I wish he would answer that question.

I'm going to be attending a KidsAbility function this Friday, where they have to raise money through the radio. It's sort of a radio-thon. I'm trying to help them in that respect. Really, they shouldn't have to rely on radio solicitations to ensure that they have sufficient funding to clear up those waiting lists, but because of the fact that the government has not been sufficiently forthcoming in this most recent budget, they will do so.

I would implore the government to take another look at that issue to ensure that those children get the services they need.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. O'Toole: The first comment I would like to make is that I'm respectful that Minister Chambers, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, is here tonight, and I know her heart is in it. I know when I've gone to her with respect to our advocacy, in our role to protect vulnerable children most essentially, she has listened. I would say that there have been issues, whether it's the Ombudsman's comments with respect to children's aid or other issues, where she has indeed listened when I've spoken with her.

The question that remains in my mind with respect to this bill and the importance of this bill, however long debated, is, does she have support at the cabinet table?

As the members from Erie-Lincoln, Waterloo-Wellington and Niagara Centre have all mentioned, I'm surprised and disappointed that the government members have been silenced on the issue, and I'm concerned about that. I'm concerned because, as a government initiative in the dying days of the debate here in the Legislature, I'm wondering what the silence is about.

To stay on topic, it's like the OLG: "I know nothing, I heard nothing, I said nothing, I do nothing," or something like that. They seem to be persuaded that silence is the best policy—don't get engaged—and I think that's what they've told their members, because I've heard some of the two-minute responses to statements made by ministers where a couple of members—the member for Mississauga West, Mr. Delaney: I felt there was a note of passion there; I felt perhaps he would actually make some comments.

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I'm drawn into this, as I said in my earlier remarks, because if I look at the minister's statements, I take this as her sincere commitment to do the right thing. In her opening remarks to address this bill on November 30, 2006, she was quite clear in saying, "I am pleased to announce the introduction of legislation to make the province's child and youth advocate an independent officer of the Legislature. In moving forward with this change, we are fulfilling a promise"—I think she was forced to do it, actually, or at least giving it a little bit of time at the end of the agenda; it was kind of an afterthought promise—"this government made on behalf of the most vulnerable children and youth to better protect their interests." I don't think there's a member here who wouldn't agree with the sentiment. We might have some differences on the process.

Why I was talking about the OLG earlier was that Mr. Marin, the Ombudsman of Ontario, in his first report and his second report on the OLG has clearly represented the integrity, the trust and the strength to deal with the victims of crime and the victims of the poorly managed part of the lottery and gaming commission. This leads me to ask, is there enough money in the budget? When I look at the bill, and this is the bill, it's more technical than perhaps—and most of the language in here is more or less about setting up an office here.

I know it's an independent office and all that stuff, but I'm going to explain it to the viewers tonight. Thank you for tuning in. This bill is a total of 10 pages. In the 10 pages, you have to realize that half of it is in English and half is in French, as it should be, so it's actually five pages. If I look at its structure, there is a small preamble which I will read in the limited time I've been given. There's a section here, subsection 1(1), that is the interpretation of "advocacy," which goes on for most of the first page. It's the "law enforcement" component and the ministerial exceptions.

The "sections" section, which is section 2 here, is the advocate: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council shall, on the address of the Legislative Assembly, appoint a person to be the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth."

It goes on to say that the officer of the assembly will set up this function, a temporary appointment perhaps, some of it.

Section 8 goes into administration. It's a very prolonged section on administration. I'm going to put on the record some of the particulars in the bill, with your indulgence.

In section 8, under "Administration," the first item is "Budget." I don't really see too much in this latest McGuinty election budget, this spend-a-rama budget. It says:

"(1) The money required for the carrying out of the functions of the advocate shall be paid out of funds appropriated by the Legislature for the purpose.

"Directives

"(2) The Board of Internal Economy"—which is sort of an all-party thing—"may from time to time issue directives to the advocate with respect to the expenditure of funds...." There is still no money.

"Estimates

"(3) The advocate shall present annually to the Board of Internal Economy estimates of the sums of money that will be required for the performance of all the functions of the advocate.

"(4) The board shall review and may alter the estimates...."—probably downgrade them.

"Audits

"(5) The accounts and financial statements of the advocate shall be audited annually by the Auditor General and the results of those audits shall be presented to the Speaker...."

"Premises....

"9. The advocate may lease any premises and acquire any equipment"—a lot of money being spent there, similar to the LHINs, the local health integration networks.

But it brings to mind, to bring it on point, that the Ombudsman has demonstrated clearly to the public, as reported in the media, that he is more than capable of oversight and having some avenue of advocacy that has proven itself in the last while. But what has not proven itself is that the minister of casinos and lottery hasn't proven adequate; that has been the issue.

The service of experts: The advocate, may enter into contracts to retain special services. Staff: Subject of the board, may retain staff. Benefits: The advocate will receive the employee benefits applicable at the time of the service and cumulative vacation and sick leave credits, plan for group life and medical.

What has this got to do with providing service to children? It's about setting up some bureaucracy here. The Ombudsman is in place. The Ombudsman has made an expression with respect to his oversight for the children's aid society, which really, quite frankly, starts to overshadow some of the issues that come into the role of the advocate. I don't disagree with the need to protect vulnerable children as described. These vulnerable children could find themselves in the youth justice system, children's mental health, a complex special-needs system, in the protection and well-being system or in provincial demonstration schools for the deaf and blind. The advocate's office also reviews cases that involve complaints about the treatment or care of children or youth in programs funded by the Ontario government. This could be the day care facility issues where certain things have happened, I think it was in the Philippines yesterday.

"Pension"—this is all under the administration section. There seems to be an inordinate amount of time spent on making sure that there's enough budgetary allowance for these things:

"(4) The advocate's staff are members of the public service pension plan....

"12.(1) The advocate may delegate in writing to any member of the advocate's staff the authority to perform any of the advocate's functions or to carry out any of the advocate's powers," subject to the terms.

"(2) The advocate may not delegate the power to make a delegation or to make a report...."

"Functions and Powers"—a lot of this bill is about setting up a whole brand new, independent bureaucracy. We have that in the role of the Ombudsman's office. I'm not in any way opposed, if I've read the history with respect to the minister, and her intentions are clear, to first and clearly and as expeditiously as possible set up this process. You talk about expeditious. The member from Waterloo-Wellington went on at some length, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence. You've got to start out this process. If you want to know about the future, look to the past. Learn from history. Here we are in July 2003, prior to the election. The Ontario Liberals issued a press release promising—amongst other things, some couple hundred promises—a future Liberal government would pass the legislation to create an independent office of child advocacy and report to the Legislature rather than to the government, much as the Ombudsman would. That's the independence that has been suggested for some time.

That was 2003. Here we are in 2007, the twilight hours of this government, hopefully the permanent twilight of this government, no personal inflections intended. But it's a failure of leadership and a failure of a plan. At the 11th hour they bring in Bill 171, the revision of

the health services act, they bring in Bill 155, which is a revision of the Election Act. They're bringing in this bill here, 165, at the 11th hour of the 11th day at the 11th minute. I'm not surprised if they just let it drift away on them, despite the minister's commitment.

In 2003, the minister commissioned research, another delay mechanism. There has been much research done on this. There have been reports and debates when we were in government, and I criticize ourselves, personally. Perhaps we didn't respond appropriately to give the child advocate the independence. They have the independence as a person, as a human being, to professionally make those statements and those assertions and take, perhaps, the consequences of their convictions.

In August 2004, the final report—this is 2004; it's frightening—of the third party was submitted to the minister. I think there was a change at that time. She's now economic development or something. They had to move that on because nothing was happening. There was no commitment, like I see today. I say again, perhaps repeatedly, that I think the current minister is engaged in the issue. I give her that. My question initially was, is there support around the cabinet table, with all the OLG issues swirling around, transportation and Kyoto and other industry issues that are out there crowding her off the table? She has a side table, almost, of the cabinet, I'm sure.

2030

In March 2005, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Marie Bountrogianni, announced legislation to establish Ontario's new office of the child advocate as imminent. The member from Waterloo-Wellington talked about the "imminent" commitment by the current minister of democratic renewal. Quite frankly, there again, the urgency isn't obvious in the expedited treatment of this bill. I'm sure it frustrates the minister; she wants to see this pass.

We probably, at the end of the day, will support it. Has there been proper consultation? Has it been thoroughly researched? Have they listened to the independent stakeholder groups? This is the process of democracy that's being truncated here. It's being robbed of the decency that this function in independence deserves. Mr. Marin has achieved it and hopefully the advocacy for children achieves it.

But what I see is quite a different agenda—not the minister. I think it's that Dalton McGuinty has no plan. Quite frankly, this is being crowded in amongst municipal renewal, municipal taxes, uploading, the budget, which is kind of an election budget. And there's \$4 million needed for the children's treatment centre in Durham. The member for Whitby-Ajax, Ms. Elliott, was chair of that, and she knows. In a personal way, she's committed daily, shall I say, in her life to this particular advocacy. She is an advocate on this issue. She would probably be happy with the minister's—but does the minister have the support? The evidence tonight, to me, is this: Not one will stand. They're obeying Mr. Levac, the whip, tonight, because if they move Mr. Caplan out,

the whip will have a say in who is ready. So they're all being silenced under the potential that they'll dump Caplan overboard. I hope that perhaps he resigns on his own.

But if I go through and I look at this, the immediacy debate, with Minister Bountrogianni saying that in 2005—it's now 2007, two years later. Immediacy? It's two years. The Minister of Natural Resources is here. He was here tonight on Bill 185, I think it is, endangered species. I think Mr. Caplan should be in the Endangered Species Act. In June 2005—the spring comes and goes; the government did nothing. On November 30, 2006, Minister Chambers introduced this bill and promised—this was promised imminently 24 months before.

"The advocate may, in his or her discretion, decide not to take any action"—this is important: independence. I'm sure they're an advocate or they wouldn't be in that position, with all the filters that occur in recruiting people for that—"on a complaint if the advocate is of the opinion that

"(a) the subject matter of the complaint is trivial;

"(b) the complaint is frivolous or vexatious; or

"(c) the complaint is not made in good faith."

First of all, what most of us here deal with in our constituencies in a non-partisan way would be the Family Responsibility Office and court orders on support and custody. It's a huge, huge issue. I wish I had the solution. As a parent—I have five children and three of them are married. I hope we don't have any encounters there. But I would say that's one of the serious areas where advocacy needs to occur and independence, outside of the court process, because the children are victimized in that situation, as I see it. I'd perhaps see a role there—if one of the advocate persons is here tonight—to say that the Family Responsibility Office and the process under family law does not consider the feelings and the vulnerability of the children in that process. I think there's a schedule of payments and visitation rights, and then there are applications to the courts about certain access. And now we have Bill 8, which is access by grandparents to children. These children, in their vulnerable and formative years, need to have a significant, caring other in their life. I say that as a grandfather, actually. I know that the minister probably has similar concerns.

"Where the advocate decides not to act on a complaint, or to take no further action with regard to a complaint, the advocate shall give the complainant notice in writing of the advocate's decision, and of the reasons for the decision." That's good. There's some accountability in that. That's good, because no one's perfect, beyond—I guess there might be a few people who are perfect. But many of them aren't here.

Again, I bring in the work that's been done by the Ombudsman, Mr. Marin. And I also want to respect the member for Nepean-Carleton, Lisa MacLeod. As a parent, working and serving the public as a very engaged individual, she's got some reservations as well. She raised these concerns over a period of time, not specific to this legislation but on the auditor's report and the

children's aid response, the CAS, and some of the comments the Ombudsman had there, at the way these independent agencies drift away from any sense of responsibility to their legislative mandate.

Our central theme is yes, advocacy for children, and yes, use existing resources. Don't create a whole new stream of rental space and staff, computer systems and harmonizing the systems and dealing with the FOI stuff and dealing with all the various administrative trivia.

On behalf of John Tory and our caucus, I want to assure Ontarians that we take this legislation very seriously. We've studied and we've welcomed the comments from stakeholders. We have to get this government to do the right thing. They are the government. Tonight they choose to say nothing. To repeat what the leader of the NDP, Mr. Hampton, said, "I know nothing, I see nothing, I hear nothing and do nothing."

Interjection.

Mr. O'Toole: I'm saying that about what has been the discussion here for some time.

I can assure you that our party, under the leadership of John Tory, will participate in a positive way to make suggestions on behalf of the children and vulnerable adults in the province of Ontario. You've got to look at the beginning and look to the history. Look back to 1980s when Bill Davis formed the first legislation for the protection of children. I'm proud to be part of the John Tory government, and I'm disappointed in this government's legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Kormos: I once again listened to the thoughtful contribution to this debate, in the modest 20 minutes allowed him, by the member for Durham, Mr. O'Toole. Mr. O'Toole stood up in his place and used that modest 20 minutes to explain to this chamber and to the folks he represents—in an effort to earn that recently significantly increased salary that he receives, he stood here and spoke up. He spoke up about children and about the office of the children's advocate, and he offered up a critique of the legislation.

Interjection.

Mr. Kormos: Now, a member from the Liberal caucus there, the Scarborough Southwest member, says, "What are we doing debating this here?" Well, this is where you debate things.

Interjection.

Mr. Kormos: Ms. Van Bommel, this is the place to do it. You don't go home and say, "Oh, nuts, I forgot to debate the bill today. I wish I—" Three and a half years ago, you Liberals were campaigning your buns off telling people how eager you were to get into Queen's Park so you could debate legislation, so you could speak for your constituents. And now what do we have? We've got the bump-on-the-log caucus in the Liberal ranks, led, no doubt, by the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Mr. Bump On The Log himself, Mr. Caplan. And here are his acolytes, fellow bumps on the log, bumps on the log in training, who want to sit there like bumps on a log. You're paid big bucks. Honest, you can get a bump on a

log for half the price you're paid. So don't sit there like bumps on a log, Liberal colleagues. Stand up. Use the 20 minutes available to you. Debate like Howard Hampton—

2040

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I certainly want to add my comments to the debate on this particular issue. As I listened to the member for Durham talking about specific parts of the bill, and he talked about the budget, I see this role of the advocate as being something that's very dedicated. I don't see how someone speaking for children and advocating for children can be doing anything else. I think it's something that needs to be specifically for this.

If you look at section 14, which talks about powers of the advocate, it talks about doing things such as receiving and responding to complaints. But one of the things that I think is crucial in this bill is section 14(d), which is to use informal methods to resolve disputes. I think that speaks to the fact that we're talking about children and youth. We're talking about children who have to have a special approach, and when we talk about that, we also talk about the fact that that's going to take some specific—when the member for Durham talks about budget, I think that needs to be there. The flexibility for the advocate to approach these children and deal with them in the way that needs to be done, that funding, that budget, needs to be there. This is a dedicated role. I think this role is one that needs to be independent of government and needs to have the flexibility to deal with these children as needs to be done.

It talks about explaining to children in language that is suitable to their understanding. It says this right in the "Powers" part of the legislation: "Language suitable to their understanding, the children's right to a review." I absolutely agree with that. I think this is important for these children. This is a very dedicated role. There is no way that this should be mixed in with anything else.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I'm most pleased to comment on the talk of my friend from the great riding of Durham. I'm always most pleased, and have for the last 12 years listened to my friend speak. He speaks the truth for the most part.

We're dealing with a bill that is really important. It has an important, fundamental distinction as to whether a child advocate shall be part of a ministry and responsible to the minister, or whether that ombudsman, if you want to call the child advocate that, would in fact be independent of the government and report directly to the Legislature.

We just happen to have a function that is going on right now between the Ontario Ombudsman and the minister who is responsible for gambling in Ontario, and we can in fact compare what they're doing at the present time.

For instance, the Ombudsman said that in the last 90 days, they have been able to piece together five cases

where the retailers claiming tickets were liars. They lied about being retailers. They lied about where to get the tickets. And that represents about \$15 million paid to internal fraudsters. On the other hand, we have Minister Caplan—this is the government side—saying, “I saw nothing, I heard nothing, I know nothing, and I did nothing.” I think that’s an apt comparison.

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I want to comment on the points made by the member for Durham. Let me say at the outset that I don’t always agree with the member for Durham, but I must say I agree with many of the points that he has made here this evening.

We all understand the importance of this legislation. We all understand the important tasks that it is supposed to fulfill. But we also understand that this legislation, the so-called independent child advocate, is not going to do many of the things that people across Ontario expect that it should be able to do and probably believe that it’s going to do.

That’s really what much of the debate is about here tonight. I know the government wants to put across the impression that this is going to be some kind of earth-shattering step forward. In fact, as the member for Durham has pointed out, if you read the legislation, the child advocate is going to be quite limited in his or her activities, quite limited in what they can do. I suspect that what this means down the road is that people across Ontario who have greater expectations of this office—and I might say greater expectations that have been fed by some of the media spin of the government—are going to be sorely disappointed. That’s why we need to debate this legislation with some care and why I was happy to hear many of the points that were brought forward by the member for Durham, who understands some of the history around this bill, some of the promises that were made and that are not going to be fulfilled by this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Durham, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. O’Toole: I want to thank the member from Niagara Centre, who is always passionate, as well as the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, who wants to speak, and I think she could have 20 minutes right now if she wanted. She did mention section 14, which I will get to. I thank the member from Cambridge, a colleague who I know is committed to many of the same themes that have maintained his status here, and the member from Kenora–Rainy River, the leader of the NDP. I appreciate his taking the time to respond. I agree with the work he’s done on the OLG file. In fact, I know—it will ring in my mind for years, the minister that didn’t step aside, as I recall.

But here’s the deal. The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex mentioned section 14. For the viewer, I’m going to specifically address subsection (2), which says that “the advocate shall not represent a child or youth before a court or tribunal.” Restricting on that, “Nothing in this act permits the advocate to summon and

enforce the attendance of witnesses, to compel testimony under oath or to compel witnesses to produce records or things.”

“Power not to act on complaint

“(5) the advocate may, in his or her discretion, decide not to take any action based on a complaint....”

Now, there is some encumbrance on the advocacy and the independence in that section, which she referred to as a complement to the powers being bestowed on this independent officer of this Legislature. I challenge that observation, and my challenge—not in a negative way—is to stand, to take your 20 minutes, to be an advocate, to break free from the reins of the whip, Mr. Levac. Speak your mind on section 14. I’ll listen attentively. I’m sure the minister needs your support, but no one is standing in support of the minister, including Dalton McGuinty, and that’s disappointing.

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The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Hampton: I’m pleased to be able to put some comments on the record on this legislation. Let me say at the outset that New Democrats for some time have been in favour of an independent child advocate, meaning a child advocate who does not report to a minister or to a ministry, but a child advocate who is independent in the sense that they are an officer of the Legislative Assembly. So insofar as that principle is enshrined in the bill, we are supportive of it.

Having said that, there are a number of things around this bill that I think the public needs to take note of. The first thing I think the public needs to take note of is this: The McGuinty government promised an independent child advocate before the last election, they promised it during the last election, they promised it the first year of government, they promised it the second year of government, they promised it the third year of government, and we did not see any legislation. We did not see this legislation until the day just a few short months ago that the auditor brought down his report on the misdeeds and wrongdoings within the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, within the Ministry of Community and Social Services and within child and family service organizations across the province. I would say most people would find that quite a coincidence. Nothing happened until the auditor blew the whistle.

What does that remind you of? Oh, yes, I know what it reminds me of. It reminds me of what has gone on at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. and with the minister responsible for lotteries. We have a lottery corporation being sued by an 82-year-old man who was cheated out of his \$250,000 lottery prize by insider lottery winners’ fraud. We have the 82-year-old man going to court and the lottery corporation having to pay him \$200,000 after they spent \$500,000 trying to defeat him in court. Then we have the lottery corporation spending \$200,000 trying to keep him quiet so the story doesn’t get in the media. And of course we have reporters filing freedom of information requests asking for information about other possible lottery insider fraud. And what did the govern-

ment do in the face of all this? What did the government do while other people were being fleeced out of millions of dollars? Well, the McGuinty government did nothing. In fact, the minister is now on record as saying he heard nothing, he saw nothing and he knew nothing.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Kenora–Rainy River, it may remind you of something but it has no relation to Bill 165. I'd like to hear about Bill 165.

Mr. Hampton: I'm coming to that. I'm just making the point that it's the same issue with the child advocate. This government did nothing until the auditor blew the whistle on them, and we have a repetition of the same situation with the lottery corporation. This government did nothing until the Ombudsman blew the whistle on them. That's just a bit of history that I think people across Ontario need to know.

This is not the McGuinty government so much fulfilling a promise as the McGuinty government finally being stampeded into action by the Auditor General blowing the whistle on the misdeeds and misuse of public money within family and children's service organizations and within the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

It would appear, then, that the legislation that finally resulted—and I think it's fair to say this—is very limited. In fact, I would venture to say that it was probably drafted up the day before the auditor presented his report. There was a quick political decision that the government needed some damage control because of all of the damaging information in the Auditor General's report, so what was drafted up was very slender indeed. That's important, because if you read the legislation, this legislation does not provide anything near what the McGuinty government was promising. It does not provide anything near what the photo ops and the press releases and the media spin had told people would be in the child advocate's bill.

Let me give you an example of what's not here. We saw in the Auditor General's report on children's aid societies and on the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Community and Social Services that much was amuck, that much was astray, that money was being spent on luxury SUVs and holidays in the Caribbean when it should have been used to provide services for children in need.

I think one of the things that people who care about kids, people at home, would want to know is, is this child advocate going to be able to delve into that sort of thing? The answer is no. So the very things the Auditor General blew the whistle on that were going on under this government this child advocate would not be able to report on. The child advocate would not have the tools, the machinery or the mandate to do any of those things.

One of the other issues that has come forward—and this is to raise the Ombudsman again—is the number of parents who have complained to the Ombudsman about some of the decisions and activities of some children's aid societies. Parents have said there needs to be an independent overseer of children's aid societies. Children's

aid societies should not be an authority and a power unto themselves. There needs to be an independent overseer so that if parents or grandparents—families—feel that a children's aid society has not acted appropriately or has not considered the facts and the evidence, they can ask for an investigation or an independent review. I have heard different representatives of the McGuinty government say that the child advocate will be able to do that, but if you read this legislation, this legislation will not provide for the independent review of the activities and decisions of children's aid societies.

Mr. Kormos: It will prevent it.

Mr. Hampton: In fact, it will prevent it. So the kind of independent oversight that the Ombudsman has been advocating—in fact, the Ombudsman has come to a legislative committee, the Ombudsman has made representations to the ministers, he's made representations to the Premier, he's written letters, he has issued reports where he advocates that his office, the Ombudsman's office, should have independent oversight capacity with respect to children's aid societies. He's cited chapter and verse why this is needed, given examples, given the history of that kind of independent oversight.

I know there are many parents, many families, who expect that that kind of independent oversight is going to be in this bill. I'm sorry to disappoint them, but it's not. It's not anywhere in this bill. In fact, if you read how this bill is set up, it is structured to avoid, to curtail the Ombudsman being able to provide that kind of independent oversight of the decisions and activities of children's aid societies. People at home need to know this. This bill is not anything near, not anything close to what was advertised and promoted by the McGuinty government over about a four-year period when they were promising an independent child advocate. That is not going to happen. We're not going to see that kind of activity.

So the question is, what kind of mandate, then, does the child advocate have? I always look at this from the perspective that we know government organizations or government agencies will often have bodies of information; they'll collect information. If I might use another example, a parallel, it seems that the lottery corporation in the most instant case had lots of information. They knew there was a lot of fraud happening, they knew there was a lot of insider taking of lottery prizes, but they just said, "Oh, we're going to keep this quiet. We're going to be very quiet about this, and any time anybody suggests that, we're going to pour cold water and ice on it and we're just going to deny that any such information, any evidence, exists."

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Mr. Delaney: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Recognizing the member's interest in another matter, it doesn't in any way change the fact that standing order 23(b)(i) restricts him to the matter under discussion, which is in fact this particular bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I'm listening carefully.

The member for Kenora–Rainy River.

Mr. Hampton: I think some of the Liberal members are rather sensitive on this issue. The point I'm making here is that if a child advocate or another body like that is going to be effective, one of the things they have to do is to be able to reach into an organization and demand that the information be produced. If they cannot require that agency or that organization to turn over the information, then they are very much toothless. If the organization or agency that may be alleged to have been a wrongdoer or is alleged to have not fulfilled its mandate or not to have provided the services that were requested is able to command and control all the information, it becomes very difficult, very difficult indeed, to give the public a complete and full picture of what has happened or what has not happened or what may have gone astray. I think the recent fiasco in the lottery corporation reminds everybody across Ontario of this.

At the bare minimum, this legislation ought to provide the child advocate with the capacity to require that information be made available; to require people to come, to present themselves, to respond to questions and to turn over the records, the e-mails and the briefing material that might be required in order to give a full and informed picture of what has happened. Is the child advocate going to have that authority? No. I'm just looking for the particular section again because the degree to which the authority is limited is interesting. I'll find it in a minute. The important thing is that the child advocate does not have the legal authority to require someone to disclose the information that they may have. The child advocate does not have the authority to require someone to produce records or to produce the information that is required. Just to give you an idea of the limitation:

"In carrying out the functions of the advocate, the advocate may ... receive and respond to complaints." The advocate can conduct a review. The advocate can represent the views and preferences of children and youth to agencies and service providers; can use informal methods to resolve disputes between children or youth and agencies; can make reports as a result of the advocate's review of a complaint; can provide advice and make recommendations. But when it comes down to the real things that you'd want a child advocate to have—in terms of the power to require someone to turn over their records, the power to require someone to produce documents, the power to require someone to produce information which may be under their control—the child advocate doesn't have any of that authority.

I suspect what's going to result from this legislation is this: The child advocate will have independent authority. The child advocate may write reports, but because the child advocate does not have the power to require records, documents and information to be turned over, the child advocate is not going to have a great deal of power. While I think having an independent child advocate is a good thing in principle, having an independent

child advocate who does not have the authority, does not have the legal capacity to require documents to be produced or to require documents to be turned over means that in many cases, when it will be most crucial, the child advocate is going to be a rather toothless tiger.

I don't know that it would be so bad to the point where the child advocate would have to stand there and say, "I saw nothing, I heard nothing, I know nothing and I do nothing"; I'm not sure it would go that far. We saw that kind of presentation recently by the minister responsible for lotteries, and that kind of presentation is frankly unprecedented in the history of parliamentary government. I don't think anyone has ever seen a performance with such marked incompetence in the Legislatures and Parliaments anywhere associated with the British Commonwealth.

I would say that the child advocate may not be as lacking in use as the minister responsible for the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. obviously is. The child advocate will not be, shall we say, as diminished in capacity as that minister obviously is; the child advocate will at least have some relevance, even with this limited authority, in comparison to the current minister responsible for lotteries and gaming. But any objective reviewer of this legislation would have to admit that it does not come anywhere near matching what the McGuinty government promised to people across Ontario and does not come anywhere near to providing the legal capacity and the legal machinery that the child advocate will need to do his or her job properly. Since we are here concerned with the provision of services and the protection of children, I would say that will be a very important failing of the bill, and it will not be very long before the Ombudsman or somebody else will be pointing out publicly this very important failure of the legislation and what will come to be known as the failure of the office.

So I would hope that before the legislation goes any further, the government would rethink its position and provide the child advocate with some of the powers and the legal machinery they really need, because protecting vulnerable children and looking out for the interests of vulnerable children is a very, very important role. I would hate to see the child advocate placed in a position where the child advocate would have to say, "I didn't know anything because I couldn't get access to the information, I didn't see anything because I couldn't get access to the information, I didn't hear anything because I couldn't get access to the information, and therefore I was not able to speak up on behalf of these vulnerable children because I didn't have access to any of the information."

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The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot): One of the things I've noticed about this place on a bad day is that the barrier to solving a multitude of our problems often relates to the smallness

of our politics. Maybe it's old school, but I've often thought—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, member for Durham.

Mr. McMeekin: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

I've often thought that rather than cursing the darkness, we need to be doing what we can, as little as it seems at times, to be lighting some candles of hope. The Ombudsman is a good example. Say what you want, but he's come up with some reports that, frankly, have been pretty scathing about government, and his reports—he's an independent officer of this assembly—have had some dramatic impact. In fact, governments race to get up on their feet to say, "We want to thank the auditor for his report and embrace all of his or her recommendations." I mean, that's been a pattern here. I think that's been good because we've been able to separate—

Interjection.

Mr. McMeekin: There goes the member from Durham again, Mr. Speaker.

We've been able to separate the issue from politics by putting in place independent folk who are less concerned about spin and more concerned about substance. We've been able to put in place a mechanism that can actually protect some of these concerns. This government has done it with respect to some changes with the Municipal Act around the ability of municipalities to appoint an integrity commissioner.

I think this is the way to go. I support it. I hope the other members of the House will as well.

Mr. Arnott: I was present in the chamber for much of the member for Kenora–Rainy River's remarks this evening. I had to make a phone call, so I was able to watch him make his presentation for part of it. He raised a number of issues relating to children's services. At one point you encouraged him to go back to speak to Bill 165, Mr. Speaker, but I think broadly speaking we should be discussing the whole range of children's needs in the course of this debate.

Certainly I had the chance to attend the association of optometrists' reception this evening, as many members would have done. They raised with me the need for ensuring that children have an eye exam before they go to school. A lot of members of this Legislature have heard the optometrist association's recommendation and request in this respect. It's something I would want to support. I think it would be of great assistance to our children's education that, if they had eye problems, they were identified before they went to school as opposed to after the fact. So I would ask the member for Kenora–Rainy River, in response to his comments, would he support the optometrists in this respect?

Mr. Kormos: It's been a long day. Mr. Bradley is still here, the member from St. Catharines. He's been sitting in that chair over in the corner section of the government caucus. He had to sit in front of the minister for infrastructure renewal, the minister for lotteries and gaming

and gambling and fraud and so on, earlier today. He's still there.

The problem, I say to Mr. Arnott, as the member for Kenora–Rainy River pointed out, is that the children's advocate, as designed by the government, will never be able to advocate for children when it comes to health care, optometric care. The child's advocate will never be able to advocate for children who are being denied IBI treatment, kids with autism. The child advocate, as designed by this government, will never be able to advocate for kids with special needs in the context of education. And that's what's tragic.

The government deputy whip, the member for Scarborough Southwest, earlier today said that he wanted this debate to wrap up, but here the government is going to drag this debate into yet a fourth day of second reading debate. We witnessed it tonight. Here we are. It's 9:15. Government members still haven't spoken. We're going to be forced into a fourth day of second reading debate. It's government members who are filibustering their own bill by dragging this into the fourth day. I find that stunningly remarkable. It's just breathtaking that we're into a fourth day because government members won't participate in the debate today but want a day all to themselves. That truly is shocking.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): I've been sitting here since 7 o'clock, and I wonder if the people watching the debate really know what we are debating tonight.

Mr. Kormos: Well, you don't.

Mr. Lalonde: I definitely know, to my colleague across the way. The debate is on the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, but we've been talking on just about anything but the advocacy bill we are discussing tonight.

I would just like to say what the interpretation of "advocacy" is:

"'advocacy' means promoting the views and preferences of children and youth as provided for in this act, and exercising the functions and powers outlined in sections 13 and 14"—which describe the functions and powers—"but does not include conducting investigations or providing legal advice or legal representation;

"'advocate' means the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth appointed under section 2;

"'Board of Internal Economy' means the Board of Internal Economy established by section 87 of the Legislative Assembly Act;

"'capable' has the same meaning as in section 2 of the Personal Health Information Protection Act."

We could go on and on to tell the people what we are debating tonight. It's the advocacy bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Kenora–Rainy River, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Hampton: I want to thank all members for their comments.

Would I support public provision of an eye exam for children before they attend school? Yes. What we know and what anyone who visited with the optometrists will know is that an eye examination is one of the most important elements of preventive health care in terms of diagnosing problems before they occur. I would agree with him on that front.

I just want to refer all members to subsection 14(3) of the legislation, which says, "Nothing in this act permits the advocate to summon and enforce the attendance of witnesses, to compel testimony under oath or to compel witnesses to produce records or things." Again, the reason that is so relevant is because we are in the midst of a huge lottery scandal in another ministry, and one of the key things that would allow us to determine what happened and who knew what would be the production of records, and we can't get a production of records, can't get it from the minister or the Premier. And now we're going to have a child advocate who is supposed to advocate on behalf of children who may be in a correctional institute or who may be in custody in one way or another, and the child advocate will not be able to require someone to attend and provide information under oath and will not be able to summon or otherwise require the production of records, e-mails, briefing notes or anything else. It sounds to me like the child advocate is going to be very much diminished by this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs. Munro: I'm pleased to join in the debate on Bill 165. Much has been made about various aspects of this bill this evening and I will take a very brief time just to look at some of those.

I think it's worth repeating the commitment this government made in its election campaign that it would create this independent office. In fact, after doing that as a promise in the election, we saw that in the fall of 2003 there was a research group commissioned to undertake developing recommendations. It was in August 2004 that that final report came out, and then, about six months later, then-Minister Bountrogianni announced the legislation to establish that this independent office was imminent. It's astonishing that that imminence actually translated into something in November 2006, at precisely the moment when the Auditor General announced a scathing report with regard to children's aid.

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The reason I wanted to dwell on that lead-up to the announcement, and its imminent announcement to coincide with the Auditor General's report, is because I think in the course of time there had been the growing expectation that an advocate would in fact have the kind of power that it would seem was missing in the ministry in relation to its children's aid societies. I think part of the debate that we have here this evening stems from the perception of what an advocate would actually be able to do. So I think that a great deal of what we are hearing tonight in our debate, and in the references to the bill

itself and some of the background to it, is disillusionment with the fact that, while there was a great deal of fanfare that this would be an independent office, it seems to be an independent office with very, very little in the way of a mandate.

I also want to go back to the question of where we stand in the country in terms of this kind of legislation. I raised the question, again about six months ago, about the opportunity for the group Defence for Children International in trying to secure a meeting with the minister on this issue. The reason this group was particularly anxious was, of course, that they had done a great deal of work on a progress report on child advocacy renewal in Ontario and an agenda for action. I recall reading this document, even though it was about six months ago, and it demonstrated very clearly the comparisons with other provincial jurisdictions and where we stood as a province within the context of the country. When I asked the minister, I was quite surprised that in her response she said to me, "You cannot start to imagine how many requests for meetings we receive." I'm quite sure there are many meetings, but it just seemed to me this was a particularly influential group who deserved that kind of recognition.

I want to come back to what I consider to be the failure in terms of what people in the public are really looking for. There are so many times that certainly the Auditor General was able to identify where there seems to be a disconnect, to use political language, between the ministry and its agencies. I don't think there's a member here who hasn't received many, many phone calls from parents, foster families, all of the players, children themselves, with regard to their frustration or their inability to get answers, their lack of understanding and having anything explained to them about the processes. I think perhaps that's where the disappointment in this bill lies for me, because I recognize that the public is looking for something that would provide that kind of support and what might certainly be referred to as advocacy.

I checked within the legislation to look at how the drafters of the bill have identified advocacy. They refer to it as the "means promoting the views and preferences of children and youth as provided for in this act, and exercising the functions and powers outlined in sections 13 and 14," which, we've already heard this evening, are extremely limiting. But it then goes on to say, as a very distinct part of the advocacy definition, "but does not include conducting investigations or providing legal advice or legal representation." When I look at the kinds of calls I get in my constituency office, I'm sure every one of us here has similar calls, and we all have to say the same thing. We all have to say that children's aid is something that is stand-alone and it isn't something that we can be involved in. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we should be involved in that regard, but what I am saying is that I fear that this bill and the office it is going to create, or is about to create, will fall short by a considerable margin and leave people in this province

with a sense of security and a sense of the advocacy being there in your corner. I have very grave concerns about that particular narrow definition of advocacy.

I think back to the public hearings on Bill 205 and the very articulate young people who came through the child advocate's office to discuss their experiences in the system. It's those witnesses I think of when I look at this bill. I am very concerned that the young people who

came that day would find this bill falling short of their needs. I think that a much stronger definition of advocacy is needed for those vulnerable children and youth in our society.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 of the clock Thursday morning, March 29.

The House adjourned at 2128.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)	York West / York-Ouest	
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Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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